Shiinamachi-senpai's Safe Day
Volume 1

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Color illustrations in Volume 1:

椎名町先輩の安全日

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椎名町先輩の安全日

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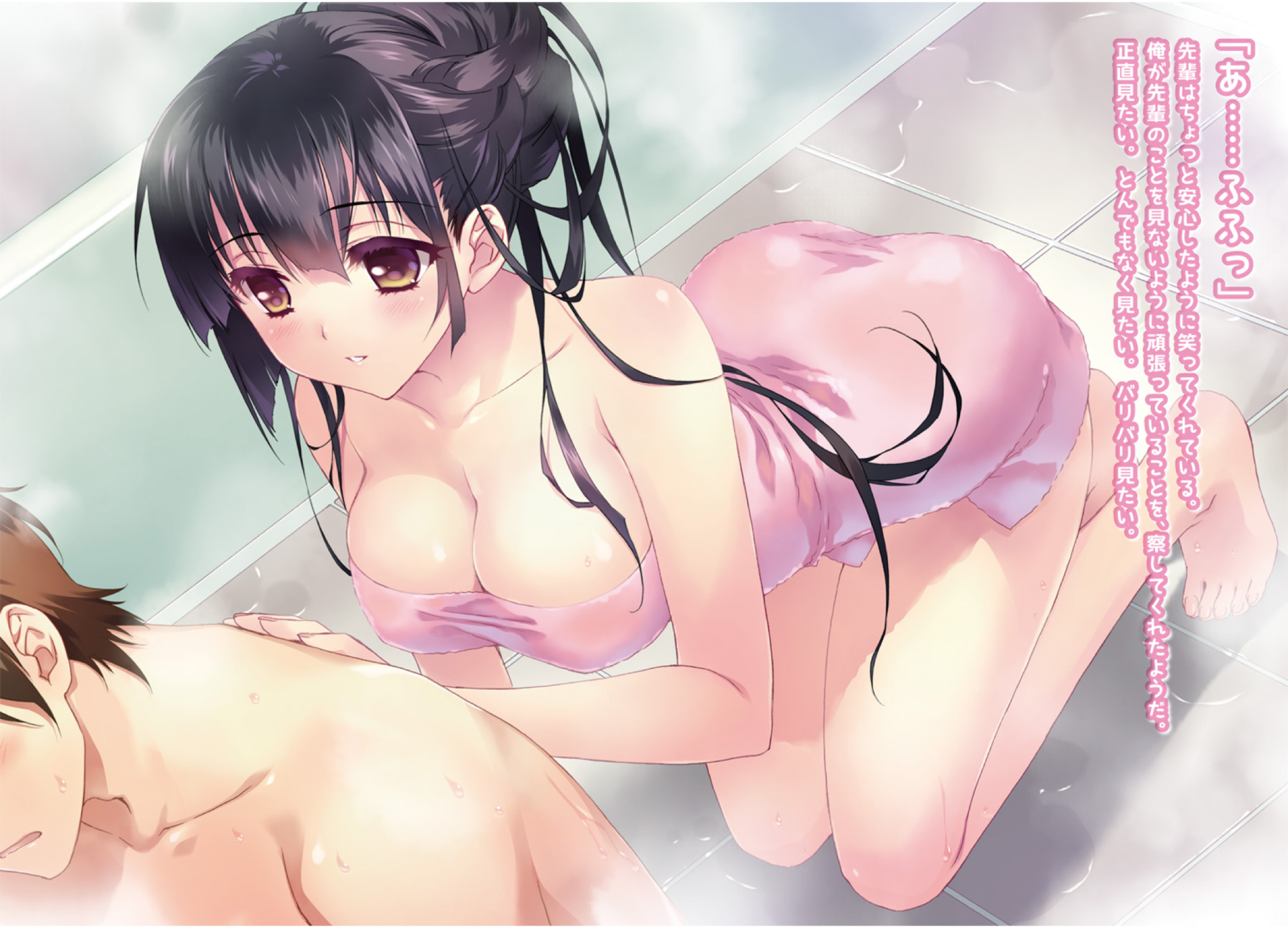
「本日は安全日なので、私の部屋まで来て下さい」

夏休みに入って数日後の廊下、いつものように夏期講習に立ち寄った日の朝。図書委員で懇意にしている椎名町香夜先輩からそんな大胆な告白を受けた俺は、それはもう驚く他なかった。

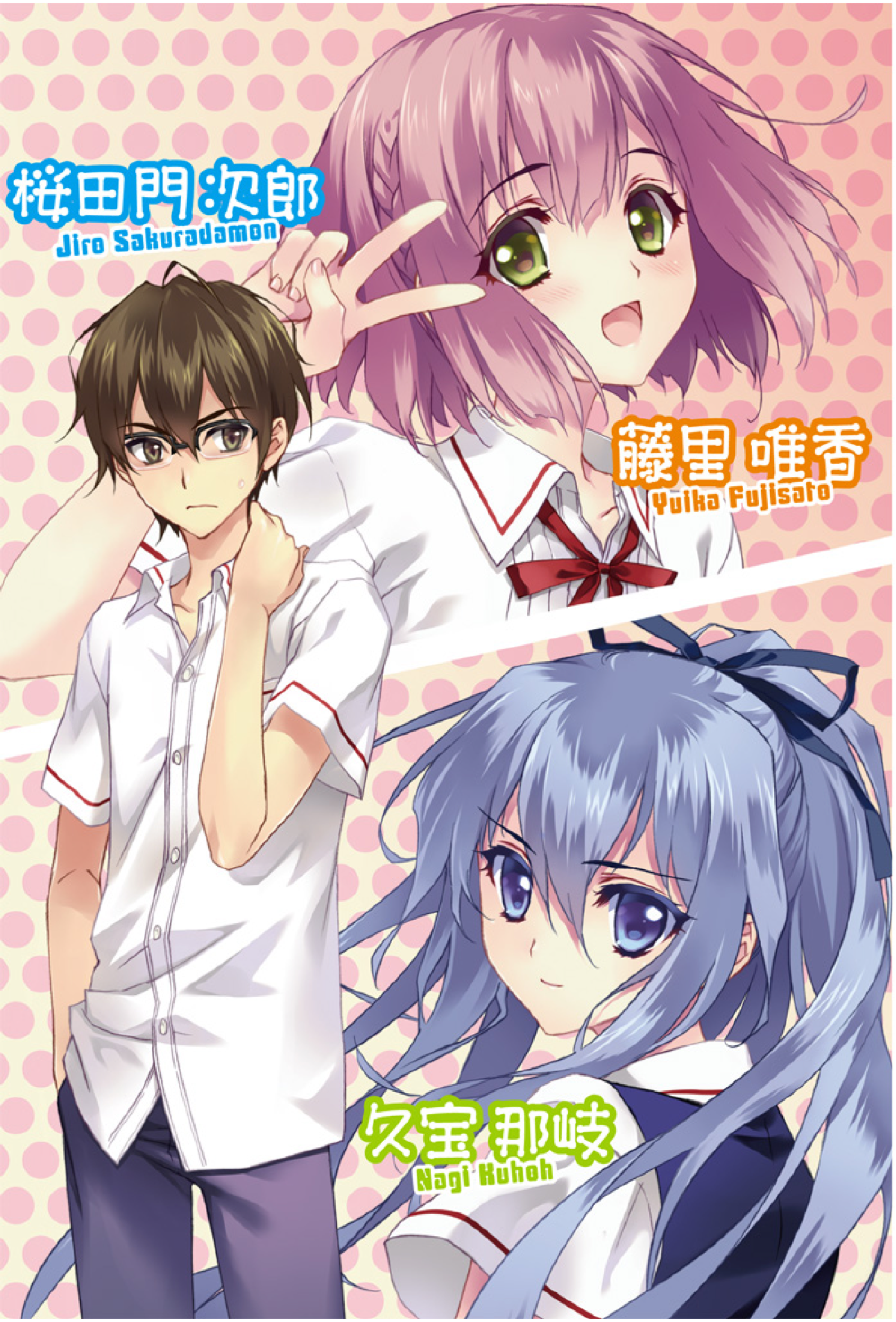


『あ……ふふっ』

先輩はちょっと安心したように笑ってくれている。

俺が先輩のことを見ないように頑張っていることを、察してくれたようだ。

正直見たい。とんでもなく見たい。バリバリ見たい。


桜田門 次郎
Jiro Sakuradamon
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Yuika Fujisato
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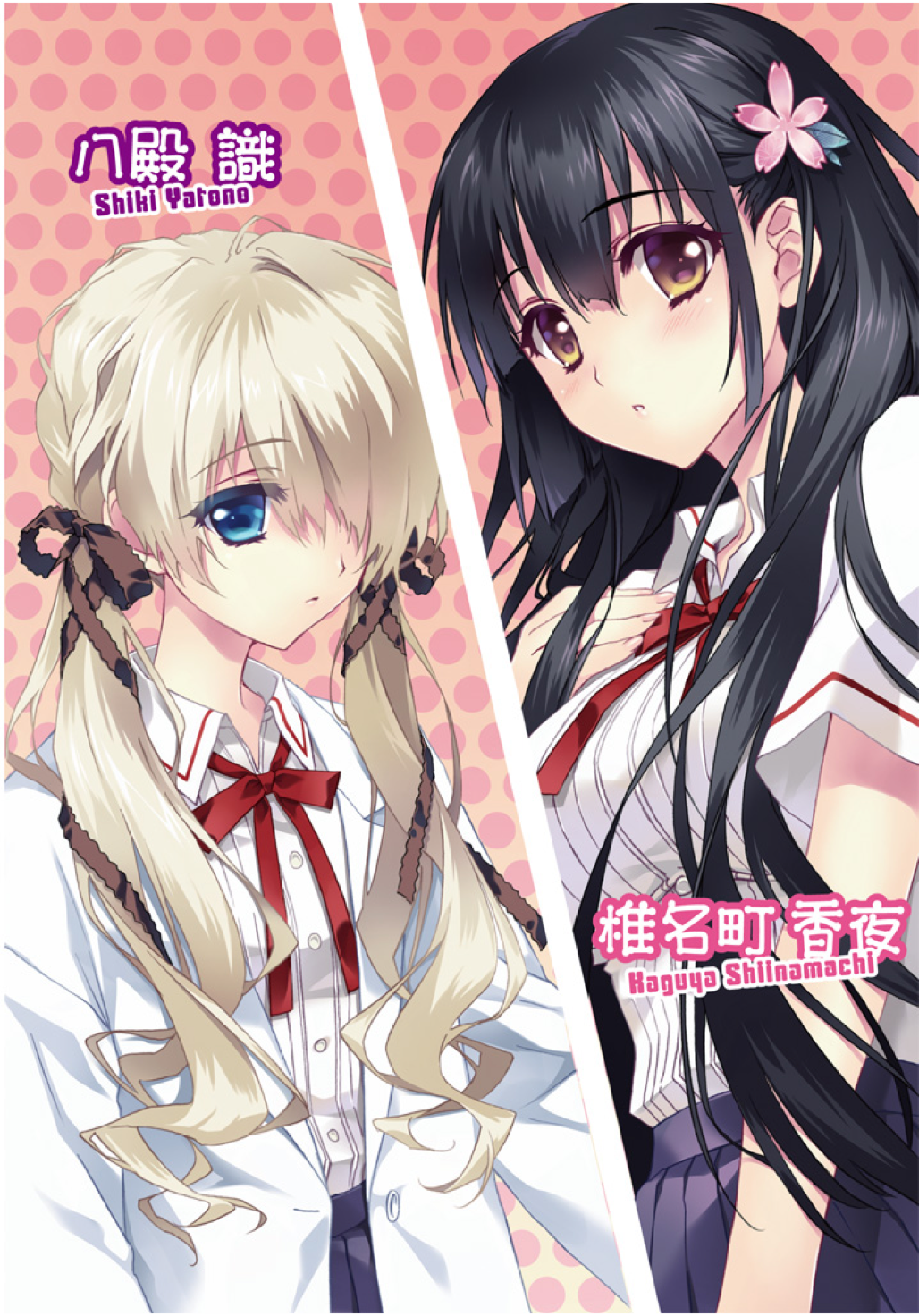

八殿 識
Shiki Yatono
椎名町 香夜
Kaguya Shiinamachi

Prologue

■July 25: sunny with clear skies

- "The arrival of death, the joy of rebirth, the bonds of involvement."

"Today is my safe day, so please pay me a visit at my room."

One morning, barely a few days into the summer vacation, I was taking summer supplementary lessons at school as usual.

Walking in the corridor, I happened to meet Shiinamachi Kaguya-senpai, one of the library monitors. Hearing such a bold confession all of a sudden, I was so shocked that I didn't know how to react. Unable to figure out the true meaning behind these words, I couldn't help but push my glasses that served only as decoration.

"Shiinamachi-senpai, may I ask... What do you mean by that?"

I stared at Senpai's face but she only tilted her head slightly. Her gentle eyes glanced downwards slightly before looking back at me with an unbelievable expression.

"Jirou-kun, basically... Today is my safe day. Tonight, just before midnight, could you pay my room a visit? My room is in the clock tower."

Senpai was even more explicit. Guessing from what she had said this time, I was not imagining what I heard the first time.

Now what was going on? What on earth was happening? When did the relationship between me and Senpai develop to such close intimacy? I couldn't help but shift my gaze away from Shiinamachi-senpai's face... to her chest.

Even covered by her uniform, the shape of Senpai's magnificent bust could still be seen clearly, slightly out of place in consideration of her petite physique. Since her figure was quite slim and delicate, I suspect her cup size must surely be quite astounding.

At the Prefectural Oukayama High School, most of the boys were obviously quite attracted to Shiinamachi-senpai. Senpai was very beautiful and elegant while her petite stature also instilled one with an urge to protect her carefully. After seeing that magnificent bust that contrasted strongly with her height and appearance, boys would inevitably find it difficult to repress thoughts of "Shiinamachi-senpai is really too awesome! (gulp)"

Naturally, I, Sakuradamon Jirou, am no exception.

"So what you mean is... At midnight...?"

"Yes. Please come find me at around 12am midnight."

Shiinamachi-senpai always looked sleepy-eyed and it was hard to see significant emotional changes from her facial expressions. Hence, no matter how hard I tried to look into Senpai's eyes, it was difficult to read her emotions. Right now, Senpai was looking upwards at me , having proposed an unexpected invitation, currently waiting for my reply--Evidently, this series of events were absolutely part of reality.

But... Even if Senpai, whom I've been crushing on, invited me on her own, could I really accept her request so lightly? Just thinking over things slightly calmly, I knew that I had never spent much time together with Shiinamachi-senpai. Within these brief moments, when on earth did I inspire such feelings in her? Or maybe, for Shiinamachi-senpai, her feelings towards me are along the lines of love at first sight?

No, how could something so wonderful actually happen for real? I warned myself. Love at first sight--That's totally a cliched plot from love stories. That kind of thing could only happen in movies or television dramas, okay!?

But... This kind of cliched love story, if it actually happened in real life, that would be kinda nice, wouldn't it?

I decided to change my way of thinking.

I should make the most of the springtime of my youth. At least within this school, I hoped to reach this goal. I wanted to study seriously, get a girlfriend and graduate while surrounded by many perfect memories. Since that was the ambition in my heart back when I transferred to this school, isn't what's happening right now a perfect and rare opportunity to make things happen?

"Are you... unwilling?"

Crap. While I was stuck in my mental dilemma, Shiinamachi-senpai asked with apparent worry.

As a girl, she must have mustered her courage with great difficulty to deliver this kind of confession! As a man, how could I take this kind of wavering look-and-see attitude? I have to show my mettle as a man all at once.

"O-Okay!"

The answer coming out of my mouth nowhere lived up to the surging thoughts in my mind. I was even stuttering a bit. I hope Senpai could forgive me.

After all... In all the years I have lived so far, never had any girl courted me so passionately.

"Really? Wonderful... I've always felt that everything would be splendid if I could choose Jirou-kun as my partner. Thank you for being willing to become the first man in my story."

First man! Come again? What did that mean? Calm down, Jirou, calm down a bit.

I frantically pushed up my vanity eyeglasses that were sliding down, then adjusted my almost irregular breathing.

This was the first time in my life to encounter something that shook my mind so much. I see, whether the meaning on this level or from various angles, Shiinamachi-senpai was naturally my first time too. No no no, hey hey hey, what the heck was the meaning? "My story" sounds far too poetic as a term... Yes, no matter how hard I tried to use other thoughts to dissolve my panic, all this only served to make me feel even more panicked.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. I feel very honored."

"Yes... Me too. I am really happy that you agreed, Jirou-kun."

Senpai smiled with gentleness.

A laid back smile surfaced on her face like blooming flower, once again drawing my gaze.

My heart would beat faster and faster uncontrollably just from the sight of her smiling face.

"Fufu."

Seeing such a sweet smile, any man would feel a sweet sense of anticipation surface in his heart!

Was this feeling of dull pain at the bottom of my heart evidence that I had completely fallen to Shiinamachi-senpai's charms already?

"Well then, please do your best for the summer supplementary lessons today as well."

"Yes, I will definitely do my best."

No matter what they're gonna teach today, I don't think I'll be able to take any of it into my mind, right?

To me, the encounter just now had shaken me to the core so much, I believe that today will surely be a day in my life worth commemorating.

--Back at the time, never in my wildest dreams would I have expected it to be the day when my life approached its end.

Chapter 1 A-Part - Thanatos and Immortal

■Search Results for "safe day":

- No information found matching the search terms " safe day".
- 0 search results.
- No related explanations found.
- No search results found related to the keywords.
- Refers to a day that is safe.

My name is Sakuradamon Jirou. Height 178cm. Weight 68kg. Normal vision in both eyes.

I'm currently studying at Oukayama Prefectural High, Year 2 Class A, volunteering as one of the library monitors. Due to family reasons, my younger sister and I have moved into this town, only transferring into this high school back in April this year. Our father does not live with us while our mother has gone missing although she did leave behind a huge sum of money, so living expenses are not a concern. Our paternal grandfather is our legal guardian. He is a great guy who puts his heart into taking care of us and currently lives together with grandmother in the neighborhood.

Someone like me was about to enter a new stage of life today, to become an adult.

My sister seemed a bit concerned, probably because she noticed that I had bathed and cleansed myself more thoroughly than usual. However, when I told her that I had specially prepared a hip bath for myself to focus my mind, she believed me. I always felt especially grateful for having such understanding family at times like these.

My sister placed a lot of trust in me. Even after hearing that I was going out late at night, she only said "take extra care" to me and did not particularly pry into the matter.

Finally, it was time for the main event.

"I feel like I really should make a stop at a convenience store..."

While thinking I must go to the convenience store to buy a certain something, I felt a little hesitant at the same time.

That's right.

As a man who's not clueless, of course I can't forget to buy *that thing*.

But then again, wouldn't it make my desires too overt if I deliberately prepared that kind of thing in advance? No no no, it'd be even more wrong to expect the girl to make prior preparations in this area.

I didn't really have much of an idea about how to handle these kinds of situations.

And it's not like I could ask my sister for help on this kind of matter even though she's very good at research.

"I'm going out later for a first experience of a lifetime. Could you tell me about the requisite etiquette when confronting that kind of situation?"

How could I possibly dare ask my own little sister something like that?

Saying those words to her would feel like demanding my own sister to be my partner, forcing her to accompany me in carrying out the entire process. That would be totally bad. She's my own sister after all and there's no way I can assert that everything's fine as long as there's love.

Noticing that my thoughts were a total chaotic mess, I decided to take a deep breath.

The summer air was very stuffy so I was still unable to cool down my mind even after the deep breath.

I guess I really must visit a convenience store with powerful air conditioning.

Deciding that, I went for a convenience store that was a fair distance from my home and the school, quickening my pace.

"Oh it's you, Monjirou-kun?"

The more it's like this kind of situation, the more likely to run into someone you don't want to meet... Could this be some kind of law of nature?

As soon as I stepped into the convenience store, someone immediately greeted me. As soon as I discovered that she was a very familiar friend, I immediately turned around from surprise and wanted to leave the store.

"Eh, why are you leaving now!?"

"Uh... It's because I never expected to run into you here , Fujisato..."

"Turning around to leave as soon as you saw me, isn't that way too mean of you?"

Fujisato sounded like she was chastising me but it was probably just a joke because there was a very friendly smile on her face.

She was Fujisato Yuika, the class representative of Year 2 Class A. When I first transferred into this high school, she helped looked after me in various ways. A girl who liked helping others. Back then, because I received her help on everything no matter how great or small, I guess we can be considered fairly close friends. Sometimes, I even feel a bit ashamed, too indebted to her.

"Oh by the way, this nickname of 'Monjirou' has already spread in school, right? But my real name is Jirou ..."

"Hmm? But don't the girls in the class all call you that? They say that 'Monjirou' sounds cute!"

"--If this nickname really has a good reputation, I guess I'd better not correct it."

"Of course, you don't need to correct it!"

Actually, I can't really accept this nickname that my close friend made for me, but since everyone already thinks of it as a pet name, I guess I've no choice but to quietly accept it.

"Fufu. I can give you a slight discount, so feel free to buy anything you like!"

"That's great. But is it really okay for you to be working part-time jobs this late at night?"

Looking at the clock, it was already after 11pm. Naturally, this was not a time when high school girls should be staying out, working night shifts.

"Yes! This store belongs to my uncle so it's totally okay for me to help out here!"

While Fujisato was smiling radiantly, I could almost hear a "shining" sound effect pop out beside her at the same time.

Fujisato was releasing a friendly, cute and adorable aura from all over her body, compelling one to accept her no matter what she was doing. I think even bigshots like the state or the police would choose to forgive her, thinking "how truly admirable for this little lady to willingly help out at her uncle's store."

"Oh, welcome. Sorry for making you wait."

Seeing the crowd of customers lining up at the checkout counter, Fujisato hurried back to the cash register in a patter of footsteps.

The image of her straight, soft hair from the back was truly a deeply memorable sight.

As an additional note, the boys in school had privately come up with a school beauties ranking. Fujisato ended up as the champion of that ranking. Of course, her face was one of the key factors for the victory, but more importantly, it was because her performance was mediocre in everything, whether academics, sports or cooking. Compared to perfect beauties who seemed to do everything flawlessly with natural ease, Fujisato's imperfection was apparently the secret to her superior popularity.

For her to be my savior, friend and the school's top-ranked beauty... If I were to buy so-called sex-related goods at the convenience store where she worked, wouldn't that constitute sexual harassment?

It felt like Fujisato would surely blush bright red if she saw *that*... From a personal standpoint, I'd really love to see that scene, but if rumors of that sort started spreading in school, I'd surely get stuck with a "Sakuradamon = Pervert" label and viciously scorned by the girls. Furthermore, the boys would also direct hostile gazes at me. I would surely end up as everyone's enemy in the end.

Fine, I give up. Don't buy *that* here.

Knowing the appropriate timing to give up was the most important thing in life. However, it would be difficult to survive in the modern world with its explosive abundance of information if one were to give up too soon without planning one's next move first. As soon as I thought of that, I decided to change my objective in this convenience store to buying a souvenir for Shiinamachi-senpai.

"Should I buy chocolate...?"

Or maybe something like bread with sweet flavors, perhaps? I cursed myself for almost never touching junk food normally, so I had absolutely no idea what girls enjoyed eating.

"Hmm? Are you here on an errand for your sister?"

Just as I heard a voice, Fujisato's face suddenly appeared right next to me.

She was leaning very very close. Her white and tender face was so near that I felt an urge to plant a kiss on her naturally.

"Yeah, p-pretty much."

While trying hard to conceal the shaken emotions in my heart, I nodded at Fujisato.

"Really? I can't believe you deliberately ran all the way to a convenience store that's so far from your house, Monjirou, could it be that you're actually super shy?"

She kept giggling lightly. There was also a fragrance drifting from her body. I felt like I was about to lose my ability to think. No good no good, hold on, Sakuradamon Jirou. How could you get seduced by your friend's beauty at this kind of place? There's a much greater objective at hand, waiting for you to accomplish.

"Basically... I don't know what girls like to eat, you know?"

In that case, I should ask Fujisato who's good at taking care of others. If I buy something for my sister along the way back home, then it wouldn't count as lying to Fujisato.

Hiding the truth while using my friend's benevolence... It's hard to avoid accumulating guilt throughout living one's life.

"Lemme see, most girls like sweet food... Oh! Here's a brand of high-class pudding that's sold exclusively at this convenience store. How about buying this pudding?"

I see, high-class pudding? It's quite appropriate as a souvenir for sure.

"Then I'll have two."

"Yes, yes, that pudding is really tasty. That's why I recommended it to you!"

Did she really recommend the buy to me after tasting the pudding personally? Perhaps it was just an unobtrusive sales technique? As one would expect, that's my Fujisato, her skills as a member of sales staff were quite good.

"Do you need anything else?"

"No, I'm okay now. Thank you."

"Not at all."

I might run out of time if I wasted too much time here.

"So... Can you come over here so that I can ring up the total?"

The unexpected occurrence had messed up my original plan but I'll just treat all this as a nice chance encounter.

By the way, what I originally planned to buy was successfully bought at another convenience store afterwards.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Examples of "bad timings" existed all over the world.

The more important a date scheduled for the night, the more likely you're going to run into people you normally don't encounter.

"Oh it's you, Monjirou-senpai."

A familiar figure was walking towards me, coming from school. She was petite and also seemed to be carrying a long slender bag. I soon noticed that she was someone I knew.

"Kuhou?"

"Yes, that's right. Good evening. I didn't expect to meet you here by chance, Senpai."

Our current location was a slope leading to the school building. In other words, unless her destination had also been school, there was no reason for her to appear on this path. Also, she was a junior in the library monitors as well as being the promising newcomer in the kendo club who was attracting a lot of attention.

I couldn't help but push my glasses up, checking out her attire again, which consisted of the school uniform.

Her name was Kuhou Nagi. Even more petite in stature than Shiinamachi-senpai, her build also matched her height quite well, being small and slender. Her straight posture and solemn gaze hinted at her identity as a maiden with a warrior's aura. There was a special air about her like that of a master, showing absolutely no " openings." Even in the middle of conversation like now, if something really were to happen, it feels like she would surely be able to react instantly.

"Senpai, what's the matter? Why are you staring at me all this time?"

"I was just thinking... Why are you still at school this late?"

Checking the time on my smartphone, I discovered that it was already after 11:30pm. No matter what kind of special reason, a girl really shouldn't be staying in school at this kind of hour.

"True. You're coming to school at this kind of hour too. From your perspective, Senpai, I really must be quite odd ."

We were thinking the same thing. If the current time was after school or early dawn, of course there was nothing out of the ordinary. But midnight was fast approaching and to think we'd encounter each other here by chance, it would be far too unreasonable.

Nevertheless, I still told the full truth directly here.

"Actually, it was Shiinamachi-senpai who asked me to make a trip to the school."

"Oh I see, then that's understandable."

She nodded very readily, prompting me to relax slightly. Yeah, I guess this explanation does have reasonable parts to it, enough to make her understand and accept...

"I just finished sword practice and I'm heading for home. Can't be helped, I really don't have too much time for training kendo alone."

I've heard that Kuhou was quite accomplished in kendo. Not only that but her kendo skills were even stronger than the teacher instructing the club, so strong that she could instruct other club members. Also because of that, she had been troubling over the lack of time to train on her own.

"I simply trained in kendo on my own then took a leisurely shower afterwards. This ends up at this hour every day after training, which is why I'm still at school so late. I guess it really would be dangerous if I weren't a martial artist girl."

She remarked, poking fun at herself, then smiled cheerfully. It's true, I could smell the faint fragrance emanating from her body after a bath. Oh dear, a girl's... bodily scent, and from a underclassman at that, I'd better not smell it too thoroughly or else I'd become a total pervert.

"Yeah, but I don't think ordinary bad guys can defeat you when you're carrying a bamboo sword."

"Haha. Please, Senpai, spare me the 'bad guys aren't going to attack a girl with such poor looks as yours' comments."

"No no no, nothing of that sort. You're very prim, proper and pretty!"

"Thank you. It's a bit embarrassing to hear that from you face to face, Senpai. I'll take it as a compliment since it'll make me feel happier that way."

Her petite and slender body was giving off an unbelievable aura of wisdom, for even her reply was so mature and understanding. I couldn't help but feel impressed, this was surely the aura belonging to a master indeed.

"Oh dear, having delayed you for so long, Senpai, I feel sorry for Shiinamachi-senpai. Please send my regards to Shiinamachi-senpai."

"Yes, I got it. You take care too, Kuhou. Don't get careless just because your skills are amazing."

"Thank you for worrying so much about me, Senpai, it makes me very happy."

She waved quickly and headed down the slope. I couldn't help but feel a bit jealous of her unwavering pace, completely free of hesitation.

Nowhere like me, almost a nervous wreck just from summoning all my courage to buy the things that's currently sitting inside my bag.

I decided I really needed to learn from Kuhou's calm manner of handling things.

While thinking that, I made my way towards the school building where the clock tower could be seen.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Naturally, the school was fitted with a security system to prevent unauthorized people from invading the school grounds in the middle of the night.

As soon as anyone opens a window carelessly, the security system would contact the security company immediately, bringing security staff on scene to the school as soon as possible.

However, like all things in life, there was always a way around it.

Our school possessed this modern building known as the Library Clock Tower and was situated on a slight hill. Hence, even as just a prefectural high school, it was also a well-known tourist attraction in the area. Furthermore, that particular tower was located some slight distance from the school building itself.

At the back of the school's outskirts was a mixed forest where there was a back door not far away from the Library Clock Tower, with only a small gate in the metal fencing. Climbing over that gate was pretty simple would not trigger the alarm.

I've heard that the tower's construction could be traced back to Japan's Meiji period when the school was founded. To prevent the clock tower's collapse, later generations had reinforced it, of course, but apparently they did not modernize too much in terms of security systems.

Oh well, the only place one could sneak into through this back door was just the clock tower, that's all. The building's front entrance--the library entrance--was shut at this hour, of course. The alarm would surely activate if I opened that door.

On the other hand, the entrance to the clock tower had nothing more than a lock.

Inside the clock tower was the office used by the library monitors. In other words, even if bad guys like thieves broke it, all they could steal would be damaged books that were waiting to be repaired.

Inside this clock tower, apart from the library monitors ' office, there was another room, the so-called Clock Tower Management Room.

That was where Shiinamachi-senpai usually lived.

Only a very small number of library monitors knew of this fact. As for why Senpai would live in this ordinary prefectural high school's clock tower, I had no idea at all.

On certain special occasions, Senpai would invite library monitors to spend the night at the clock tower. This had already become something of a library monitor tradition. I once participated in one of these stayovers with some other library monitors before, but because all the other monitors were girls, the atmosphere was totally embarrassing, hence I never joined in again after that.

But this time, it was just me alone.

Also, I can't believe that Senpai's reason for inviting me was because "today is a safe day."

As an average high school boy at the peak of puberty, how could I not blush and get excited after hearing this kind of reason?

"Hmm, ahem..."

However, it was common for Shiinamachi-senpai to act a little airheaded.

It was very possible that she had mistaken the term " safe day" for something else, totally misusing the words.

That pounding feeling in the heart, special to teenagers , would frequently fail to escape the fate of disillusionment. As a result, I shouldn't get my hopes up too much. No matter what Senpai's true request turns out to be, I will do my best to fulfill it, I absolutely won't disappoint Senpai.

While telling myself that, I went over the metal fencing and soon arrived at the clock tower's entrance

It was a heavy door made of steel.

On the left side was a slightly large keyhole.

Taking out the key possessed only by certain library monitors--in other words, the students who had received keys from the supervising teacher or Shiinamachi-senpai--and inserting it into the keyhole, I heard the click of unlocking.

All this seemed almost like the act of unsealing something important, but in a certain sense, there was indeed a lovely endearing girl living inside, Shiinamachi-senpai, hence it was perhaps necessary to be guarded to such an extent.

"Thanks for having me."

After opening the door, I called out into the interior, then closed and locked the door behind me.

Before my eyes was a spacious room, illuminated hazily by faint lighting. The walls were packed with a ton of bookshelves. In the center of the room was a large table for meetings with magazines, light novels, stationery and other personal belongings scattered all over it. Apart from that, on the left and right of the table were a number of objects including even a fridge, a gas stove and an electric fan. There was also a curtain over the window.

Then there was a giant clock face leaning against the wall on the far end of the room, almost human height. This faceplate apparently belonged to the clock used for the clock tower in the past, but because it became too old, it was later replaced by a newer faceplate and the old one was dumped into this room.

In any case, this was the Library Monitors' Office. We monitors would normally gather here to sort out books, check library cards, confirm if there were any overdue books, and on occasion, hold tea parties here too. This was originally a storeroom with substantial space and people say that it was through the diligent efforts of many generations of former library monitors that this place was cleaned up to become the secret room of the library monitors.

However, this clock tower's clock was only for decorative purposes nowadays. The hands had stopped turning a long time ago.

I had no idea when the large clock had stopped, but if the clock's gears were to turn all day and all night, I'm sure it would make a lot of noise and affect Shiinamachi-senpai's sleep, so I think it's a great thing that the clock no longer moved.

On the side of the room was a wooden staircase, spiralling up along the walls in a square shape. After climbing roughly the height of three floors, one would reach a door.

Behind that door was Shiinamachi-senpai's room.

With every step on the wooden staircase, a slight creaking sound could be heard underfoot. Although I didn't think the wooden boards would come loose, I still gripped the hand rails tightly, making my way up step by step, surely and steadily.

Senpai relied on this staircase to go up and down several times a day. Doing this persistently, I'm certain it would make for an excellent workout for the legs and waist, right? Was her voluptuous figure, slender in all the right places, sculpted from this sort of daily lifestyle? I couldn't help but imagine these things.

While I was immersed in these thoughts, I had already climbed beyond two floors, reaching the third.

Clock Tower Management Room.

Those were the mottled words on the metal plate over the door.

Unlike the door at the entrance, this was a wooden door, giving an old feeling.

Knock knock.

"Shiinamachi-senpai, this is Sakuradamon. I'm here to visit you."

I knocked concretely on the door. While waiting for Shiinamachi-senpai to answer the door, I took the opportunity to check the time.

The smartphone in my hand currently displayed the time of 11:55pm. In terms of timing, it was perfect.

Like that, I silently waited for Senpai to answer.

...However, a long time passed and still Senpai did not answer.

Perhaps Senpai had slept already, I couldn't help but wonder in my heart.

If that were the case, wouldn't it be better if I made a phone call? But that would disturb Senpai's sleep which I was loathe to do. No wait, it was Senpai who invited me here after all, shouldn't I wake her up?

While hesitating, I reached out and grabbed the door handle.

The wooden door instantly slid open quietly without a sound.

"The door's open?"

This was an excellent chance for me to peek at Shiinamachi-senpai's sleeping face... I hastily banished this delusion that had suddenly surfaced in my mind.

"Senpai, it's me, Sakuradamon. I'm here to visit you."

I raised my voice slightly but still, Senpai did not answer.

Maybe she was currently in deep sleep? If that were really the case, then I should go home for now instead.

--Just at this moment...

I sensed a heavy atmosphere inside the room... It filled my heart with an inexplicable sense of agitation.

Was this what people called "a sense of foreboding"?

"...Pardon my intrusion."

To dispel this sense of foreboding, I resolutely and decisively stepped into Senpai's room. This was perhaps a bit ungentlemanly of me, but I decided to blame the voice that was locked away deep in the depths of my heart.

"Senpai?"

I pushed the wooden door open and examined the room's interior. There was a choking smell coming from inside.

--A concentrated smell of *fresh blood* rushed into my nasal cavity.

Immediately, I couldn't help but doubt the scene that entered my eyes.

Shiinamachi-senpai was lying on the floor in the dead center of the room, all covered in blood.

"Senpai!?"

I frantically rushed over to Senpai's side.

The amount of blood loss was extraordinary. With Senpai in the center, a small pool of blood had formed over an entire patch of the wooden floor. Dressed in her school uniform, Senpai was lying face up on the floor, looking as though asleep.

Then as much as I didn't want to witness it, I still saw it inadvertently... There was a bright red trail left behind in front of her chest.

That should be where the wound was located. I saw a wound that seemed to have penetrated both her uniform and her body. The blood was flowing out from Senpai's back, so it looked like the wound had skewered Senpai in one blow, coming out her back.

Unbelievably, a wound piercing the center of the chest and exiting the back.

An ordinary person would definitely die beyond a doubt in t his kind of situation.

In other words, Senpai was already...

"..."

Completely unbelievable. Back when I met Senpai in the daytime, she was still smiling at me so radiantly.

However, Senpai will never say another word again. Her eyes will not open again. No longer will she... No longer will she smile at me again.

The moonlight shone on Senpai's body while silence hung in the air, almost hurting one's ears. I couldn't hear any other sound at all apart from my own heart beat. No matter how hard I tried to listen, I couldn't hear Senpai's breathing. The pulsation of the heart beating was no longer occurring in her chest. It looked like her heart had already stopped beating, most likely...

Judging from the way things looked, in other words, she really was totally...

"Senpai, Senpai!"

I refused to believe the truth before my eyes and picked up her slender body in my arms, calling out loudly nonstop at her pallid face.

"Senpai..."

I understood.

This wound had surely taken her life on the spot.

In the center of Senpai's chest was a very very deep and red wound. There were no other wounds on her body, so most likely, she was pierced in one breath without even a chance to resist at the time. In that case, that blade was surely driven without any hesitation at all , a move undertaken completely with the intent to kill.

"How could something like this happen..."

During the daytime, Senpai even told me today was a " safe day." She clearly said that to me.

If there was no safety even for Senpai's life, then what meaning was there to everything?

"..."

All along, the Senpai I admired had treated me very well. Who could have expected that I would witness with my very own eyes Senpai's death in this manner?

Her face looked very peaceful after her death. Perhaps this was the only thing that felt consoling.

If Senpai had died with her eyes wide open in fear, or if there were tears remaining in the corners of her eyes, I might feel even more angry and sad.

"Senpai, sorry, I should have come earlier."

If only I hadn't made detours to the convenience stores , if only I didn't chat with Kuhou earlier... In that case, perhaps I would've made it in time. However--

"...People always regret only after things have happened, don't they...?"

In order to calm myself down, I pushed my vanity glasses.

That's right, I don't want to leave Senpai like this.

Judging from the situation, I guess... I should call the police first.

With that, an ambulance would probably come together as well.

Although I knew that it was too late for her to be revived, at least I hoped for a chance to accompany Senpai along the way to the hospital at least.

Just as these thoughts crossed my mind...

Thud.

I suddenly heard a certain sound behind me.

It was like someone stepping on the floor.

Soon, that sound approached my back.

I was just about to turn my head and check if someone was there--

Just in that very instant.

Throb.

My heart made an intense sound of beating.

At the same time, an intense feeling of heat and pain was felt from my back, entering the center of my body, reaching straight to my chest.

I looked in front of my chest in trepidation and discovered the tip of a sword, covered in fresh blood.

This move, this method of wielding a sword...

Undoubtedly, this was how you took a life by stabbing the heart directly from the back.

In other words, at this very moment--

Someone had killed me with a sword from behind.

While I became aware of this fact, the view in front of me had turned all blurry.

I was still feeling intense pain earlier but now even my senses were fast disappearing.

My body felt exceptionally cold.

In a certain corner of my mind, I couldn't help but gradually understand that this coldness was the feeling caused by massive blood loss.

--Never did I expect that someone like me would be able to die together with the Shiinamachi-senpai whom I admired.

Or perhaps, this could be considered a type of ending for one's life.

I couldn't help but think that.

Hence, on the verge of death, the last words I spoke were...

"Thank you... for killing me as well after killing Shiinamachi-senpai--"

To think I'd thank the murderer out loud, even I thought that there was something wrong with my brain.

But at that moment, I no longer had the strength to make a self-deprecating smile. My entire body collapsed powerlessly on top of Shiinamachi-senpai.

--I, Sakuradamon Jirou, thus met the end of my seventeen-year-old life.

Chapter 1 B-Part - Thanatos and Immortal

■Search Results for "immortal":

- Meaning will not die. Can also refer to a body that can resist all sorts of illnesses, pain, injuries and attacks.
- Carries the meaning of relentless perseverance no matter what setbacks are encountered. Also refers to people with this characteristic.
- A state where one will not die regardless of any kind of bludgeoning or slicing attack.
- Impervious to pain, neither getting hurt nor dying.
- Refers to a person who has obtained an immortal body.

In my hazy state, I dreamt that I was drifting in the darkness.

This kind of dream was very common whenever one started dreaming while in a totally exhausted state. In other words, I was currently sleeping very deeply in all likelihood.

Just at this moment, unintentionally--I seemed to hear my mother's voice coming from somewhere.

Hence, my awareness focused itself on the voice of my mother who had left me a long time ago.

'Jirou, you must live on.'

These words--These were the final words my mother said to me before she disappeared.

'Your future life will surely be a difficult road to travel. As your mother, I have already taught you all the skills and ways of thinking I can teach. Here on, no matter what you must do, no matter how much you will bloody your hands, even if you have to make others or yourself shed blood or tears, you must live on properly. Jirou, this is your destiny.'

My mother had said these words to me with aloofness. The next morning, she disappeared without trace, as though she had never existed at all to begin with. The only things she left behind were a stamp and a bank account containing a giant sum of money.

Back then, I had yet to understand the concept of loneliness.

But now, I was finally able to understand how painful a separation it was.

As I am now, perhaps I would be able to speak out asking my mother not to go.

Ultimately... I definitely learned from my mother all sorts of things that no ordinary mother would teach a child.

Even so, I still remained greatly grateful to my mother.

That was why my chest felt so empty, as though a huge hole had been gouged from it.

Or perhaps because of that--I was feeling pain in my heart.

'Slowly, you will understand what is heartache. Once you understand that, absolutely do not forget that feeling . It will become a valuable experience for you, the most important emotion. As a result, you must embrace that emotion and continue striving to survive amidst the pain and suffering. Do you understand? No matter how great the pain and suffering your body or soul feels, you must live on.'

I was definitely able to endure the body's pain.

However, I had never experienced the feeling known as heartache.

No, perhaps the separation with my mother itself had already made me experience heartache already.

Was that why I was feeling such pain in my chest...?

--No, it's not like that. This pain coming from my heart was not the feeling of heartache.

At this moment, floating in the darkness, I was starting to see a large amount of red droplets.

That was--fresh blood. A great volume of blood was surging out from my chest.

At this rate, I was going to die. My mother clearly asked me to live on properly but my life was quickly reaching an end.

However... That's right, I felt quite satisfied with my death.

That's why my mother said those words, probably to scold me for harboring such thoughts.

...Mother, I'm sorry.

But I really feel that this is fine.

Because, to think I can actually... Die while embracing the feelings a human ought to have.

At the time, knowing that I could die together with her , I really felt very happy.

So--

'This sort of thing is neither here nor there. You must live on properly. Hurry up and open your eyes.'

That was what my mother said to me.

Somehow in my memories, my mother's tone of voice seemed quite gruff.

Oh right, my mother's personality really seems to be like that.

'Also in the future--a destiny akin to despair yet filled with happiness is waiting for you.'

My mother's voice was making my consciousness gradually awaken.

In other words, I still had not...

Then the originally dark space instantly filled with silver brightness like moonlight.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

I opened my eyes to see the lower edge of a bosom that was boldly stretching the clothing's fabric.

"Good morning, Jirou-kun."

"...Huh?"

I felt the warmth of a hand's touch on my hair. Only after a while did I realize that someone was currently stroking my head. Beyond the voluptuous bosom, I could see Senpai's face with a gentle smile.

Was everything a dream? While thinking that, I shifted my gaze slightly to the side. The pool of blood earlier was no longer visible on the floor and my body didn't look like it was bleeding.

But when I looked up at Senpai's face, I immediately noticed blood stains on her face and hands. Moonlight was streaming in through the window, illuminating her, producing an extremely surreal scene.

"Oh, this is your blood, Jirou-kun, so don't worry about me."

...No, even after hearing her say that, I was still worried.

In other words, I was definitely killed by someone but my wounds were not that serious. Not only that, even Senpai was able to survive miraculously as well... Is that what happened?

Or perhaps, I've actually entered the afterlife? The dead bodies of Senpai and me were still collapsed on the side while she and I had perhaps turned into ghosts at this moment.

Oh well, it's fine even if that's true. In that case, Senpai would be able to continue displaying her smiling face. This fact alone was enough to make everything perfect.

Just as I was thinking that, Senpai spoke up:

"If today weren't a safe day, dying on the spot would have been likely."

She said something incomprehensible.

"...Huh?"

I couldn't help but leak a weird noise from my lips, surprising even myself. What I understood about the keyword "safe day" was totally impossible to connect with Senpai's meaning.

"Oh, how should I put this...? It is quite difficult to explain indeed..."

Senpai was making a troubled look. She first looked up, then to the side, then to the back.

She looked like she was trying hard to find a suitable manner of explanation, then she said:

"Tonight's situation is very coincidental and special, which is why I happened to not die. Then... Putting it this way, perhaps you might find it difficult to understand, but I am truly sorry, I accidentally made you immortal."

Hmm.

I totally can't understand what Senpai was talking about.

But I currently have a need to show my outstanding comprehension abilities.

Shiinamachi-senpai was not an articulate person to begin with. Instead, she was the type who would listen quietly to other people chatting while she smiled and enjoyed her tea.

That's why I must show that I have already understood her, so as to help her continue.

That's right, lemme think... What Senpai just said--

- If today weren't a safe day, dying on the spot would have been likely.
- Because today's situation was special, Senpai did not die.
- I have currently become immortal.

Very good, totally incomprehensible.

"So it's kind of like vampires?"

Even so, I still asked a question within my realm of understanding. Senpai thought for a while before answering:

"There's no need to drink blood... But indeed, it is a bit similar to the type of monster you brought up."

What? Was Senpai actually a monster?

And I can't believe that even I have become the same type of monster as well?

While feeling surprised, I tried to find a way to accept--

...No no no.

If I were to accept this fact so easily, then surely my brain must have problems.

Although that's what I thought...

"Excuse me... Do you understand what I mean?"

Senpai made a worried look as she said that to me. I totally could not tell her honestly that "No, I don't get it at all." That would make me feel like a criminal.

"Anyway, let's just pretend for now that I already understand."

Surely Senpai would feel even more troubled if I acted in a panicking manner, refused to believe her words or even took strange actions.

I definitely did not want Senpai to feel troubled.

In that case, choosing to believe would be the only right answer. So let's do that.

"Yes... I'm so glad, it was fortunate that I chose Jirou-kun... Had I chosen someone else, surely they would be in greater panic now."

Well no, I'm actually panicking inside, you know?

If I really said that out, Senpai would surely... (omitted), so I definitely can't say it.

Men gain strength gradually through times of keeping quiet, again and again.

Even so, Senpai just said that "it was fortunate that I chose Jirou-kun."

No matter what those words meant, I really felt very happy.

"Also, Jirou-kun, I believe that my murderer is still in school and probably nearby... What do you think we should do?"

Senpai asked me a question but right this moment, I was currently lying on Senpai's lap, admiring her bust from below. I really wanted this state to persist longer.

But now was not the time to be thinking about such things.

The enemy's technique was so clean, to think I was killed effortlessly without making a sound, based on this point, even if we were to attempt a search right now, we would most likely face a futile predicament. Besides, although this time, Senpai had already died when I discovered her, next time Senpai might get murdered before my eyes, if that were to happen, I might die from the shock.

--Given such technique... Even fully prepared at maximum vigilance, there was no guarantee that--

"No, I don't want Senpai to get killed by the murderer again, so please allow me to continue lying on your lap."

I decided to voice my desires honestly and ask Senpai to pamper me.

"You're right. If I were to die again, you would lose your life as well."

"What?"

Another piece of news received.

What did her words mean? What on earth had I become?

Everything was likely secretly developing in a world that I did not understand and I had just happened to get swept up into that world. Using the remnants of comprehension in my mind, I came to this conclusion after some thinking.

'--When you are desperately backed into a hopeless corner, the most important thing to do is to get a grasp on the situation first. No matter how difficult it is to accept the circumstances, you must treat everything as preset facts and accept them. If there is someone you can ask in person to learn about the situation, then your first task is to gather as much available information as quickly as possible so as to guide yourself on further action to take.'

This was one of the lessons teaching me how to survive that my mother had left behind.

"Senpai, if possible, can you explain things with a little more detail?"

"Before that, would you like to go to the bathroom to wash off the blood stains on you?"

What?

Just as I was trying hard to figure out the situation, Senpai did as she pleased and offered her suggestion.

"I have washed up already, so there might be some blood remaining in the bathroom. Sorry about that."

And now, I was going to use the bathroom that Senpai had just used?

"Then I will gladly take up your offer."

"Okay, then... I shall lower your head onto the floor for now."

Senpai carefully covered my head with her hands then lightly set my head on the floor.

A cushion had apparently been placed on the floor beforehand and its soft texture enveloped my head. Senpai's thighs really were too comfortable as a pillow but too bad... However, seeing Senpai cherish me so much, I felt very happy as soon as I thought that.

That being said, I couldn't keep lying here, of course. If I maintained this posture and looked to the side, the view beneath Senpai's shirt would enter my eyes, in other words, I would accidentally see something I shouldn't.

I cleared my thoughts. Troubles, be gone.

To prevent myself from looking to the side, I reached out and pushed my vanity glasses.

--The glasses were also smeared with blood. Looks like I'd better hurry and wash up.

"Okay!"

I finally managed to get up and looked around me.

Senpai's room was a suite and looked very neat and tidy. The large amount of spilt blood earlier was totally not visible. Of course, none of the blood I bled could be seen either. Did Senpai wipe and clean away all the blood stains by herself?

Speaking of which, I bled so much yet unbelievably, there was a way to make me survive. Somehow it felt like the volume of bleeding would exceed what was known as debilitating blood loss--Could this be evidence of my becoming immortal?

Ignoring all this for now, I'd better do as Senpai suggested first. I must hurry and help Senpai feel reassured.

"So, Senpai, I'll be borrowing your bathroom--If there are any details in the situation you'd like to explain, tell me later, okay? For example, why did you ask me to come to your room today..."

"Yes, I will be able to explain that part to you immediately."

"Thanks."

Having said that to Senpai, I looked at the door on the deep end of the room.

That should be the door leading to the bathroom with the sink and washroom.

...Okay.

"Then I'll be off."

"Fufu. You mean you're setting off for the bathroom, isn't that right? Okay, take care!"

Senpai smiled at me... That finally took a load off my heart.

Although I had no idea at all what kind of situation I was in, as long as Senpai was still willing to smile at me, everything was okay.

Thinking such thoughts, I opened the door leading to the washroom.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Shower...

The bathroom that was not really cramped was filled with the fragrance of body wash and shampoo as well as warm steam.

I first tried to wash the blood stains from my body and the blood was completely scattered by the hot water. Seeing the red water flow to the drain hole, only then did I get a real sense that I really had been killed.

Even though Senpai had cleaned up the blood stains in the room, she still could not wipe away all the blood on my body. As soon as I recalled how Senpai's hands still had blood on them, I felt apologetic to Senpai. Also, she was not afraid of getting herself dirty, even letting my lie on her lap. At this moment, my heart was filled with gratitude towards her.

--That's right. Currently, to think that I was able to feel the emotions of "thankfulness" and "gratitude", this was quite a great event worth celebrating, so I decided that I must not forget these emotions and continue to strive hard to live on. Due to a certain incident, I was finally able to understand these "emotions" hence I must treasure these emotions even more... This was a lesson taught to my from past experiences.

I reached to feel my back.

The part where I should have been cut by the blade now felt smooth without any scar at all. Nevertheless, whether my memories or my body, both firmly remembered that pain and sensation. It probably was not a dream or a hallucination.

"I really was stabbed and I really resurrected, what on earth..."

Senpai had said "I made you immortal", was this true too?

No wait, what does immortal mean?

"So it means I won't die again?"

Simply pondering the meaning of this term, it seemed quite astounding. Shiinamachi-senpai had made me immortal, so that was how I was saved. Even if that really was the truth, it was still hard to believe. Even if someone were to say to me suddenly that "from now on, you won't die again", it was still very hard to say if it was actually true or not without experiencing it for real.

"However... Sigh, I guess I'll choose to believe for now.
"

Shiinamachi-senpai always gave off a feeling like she was detached from the mundane world, as such, she would occasionally say strange things. However, it was definite that she rarely lied. If I had to test whether I was truly immortal, that would require dying in order to know the result. I didn't really want to test it for real.

Anyway, I'd better hurry and give my body a wash.

If something really did change about my body, then I probably might discover something after washing myself clean.

While thinking that, I turned myself to the mirror, little expecting that...

"Hmm?"

I really discovered something. At my chest--on the skin just above my heart, there was a kind of red pattern.

It looked a bit like a tattoo... Or perhaps an emblem. It resembled some kind of bird mascot... As though someone had drawn a magnificent type of bird on my chest like a peacock but currently, the pattern was not very clear.

"What's going on?"

I scratched the pattern with my fingernail but nothing stuck to my fingertip. The pattern seemed to be surfacing from the flesh entirely.

I pulled and pinched as a test but apart from distorting the pattern, there were no other changes.

Currently, I guess I'll just have to accept the fact that "a certain pattern has appeared on my skin."

"Okay, I'll ask Shiinamachi-senpai later."

This was my conclusion. In the end, I still didn't understand what it was about.

My body seemed to changed in various ways. If I don't listen to Senpai's detailed explanation, I probably won't be able to imagine or deduce much on my own.

In that case, let me leave things as they are for now.

Thinking that, I started to wash my hair. First I used hot water to wet my hair then I poured shampoo on my palm... Staring at the shampoo, I thought to myself, "this is the shampoo that Shiinamachi-senpai is using" then applied it to my hair.

While lathering up my hair, I immediately found patches that were stuck together. It looked like blood had splashed onto my hair as well.

If the blood had splashed onto my head at the time, then the person stabbing me must have gotten a lot of my blood over him or her. Just as Senpai said, if we searched the school or the vicinity now, perhaps we might easily find the culprit all covered in blood. Be that as it may, the murderer was someone capable of killing me with one accurate strike of the sword. Even if we really found the murderer, the situation would still be very dangerous.

If the murderer found out that Senpai and I were actually still alive...

--Oh, that's right. The murderer might instantly turn back to finish the job.

Thinking that, I couldn't help but start worrying about Senpai so I sped up my hair washing motions.

This can't continue. I have hurry and ask Senpai about the whole story and think of a solution.

I washed the suds from my head, shut the tap for the shower head then turned towards the door. Just then--

"Excuse me... Jirou-kun."

I heard Shiinamachi-senpai's voice coming from behind the frosted glass.

"Eh? Oh, I'm almost done... I've already finished washing my hair and I'm about to get out."

Senpai was probably preparing a bath towel for me? I was casually thinking that but did not expect--

"Excuse me... May I enter?"

"Huh?"

For an instant, I completely failed to understand what Senpai was talking about.

May I enter?

I ruminated over the meaning of these words over and over again in my mind--

"Ehhhhhhhh!?"

I couldn't help but cry out.

"Umm... I think that I should explain to you the changes your body has undergone..."

"Oh, o-okay."

I definitely hoped that Senpai could explain to me, but that should be after I finish my bath and return to the room!

"I would like to apologize to you--and to deepen our relationship... So... I was thinking I could help scrub your back or something..."

"Ehhhhhhhh!?"

I cried out again. No wait, calm down. Sakuradamon Jirou, hurry and calm down!

Was this really okay? Am I actually in a dream? Or perhaps I died a long while ago and I'm currently somewhere in heaven, which is why everything is developing in the direction that I hoped?

Otherwise, that innocent and adorable Senpai in my heart who has absolutely no experience with males in that regard, the pure and untainted Shiinamachi-senpai, how could she make such a adult-oriented suggestion?

"Y-You refuse...?"

Assuming we are a boy and a girl with healthy minds and bodies, of course this suggestion must be refused! How should I say this? After all, the two of us haven't progressed to that kind of relationship yet, right? But if

Senpai believes that developing this kind of relationship is okay, then naturally that means she really feels that way towards me.

Back then, Senpai had also told me that "today is my safe day, so please pay me a visit at my room." Judging from that angle, of course I feel very excited and elated. But as soon as I recalled Senpai's earlier explanation, I know that she had simply mistaken the meaning of that term. Precisely because of that, I feel even more strongly that the innocent and adorable... (further descriptions omitted) Senpai in my heart probably isn't conveying that level of meaning right now.

...Okay. I decided to reject Senpai's request for now and listen calmly to her first. Yes, let's do that.

"Please come in."

However, the words coming out of my mouth agreed to Senpai's request instead.

Was this perhaps the best example of "the mouth being more honest than the heart"? Or perhaps, this was a snapshot of the reality, "how could a man's heart be willing to miss out on such an excellent opportunity"?

No matter what, this was Shiinamachi-senpai we're talking about and I now have the chance to be with her together in the bathroom.

This was a special situation that was quite unlikely to happen a second time in a lifetime. Rather than unlikely, it'd be better to say it can't possibly happen again. In a lifetime, there are many opportunities that only come up once. Hence, no matter what kind of opportunity, one must never let them slip. So, Sakuradamon Jirou, it's okay, just take a good look and appreciate Senpai's naked body! Yes! Let's do it!

While trying hard to explain myself, I stared at the frosted glass.

"Then... Pardon my intrusion."

Then Senpai... She stepped into the bathroom, wrapped in a bath towel.

Pale skin, collarbone, arms, then there were the thighs, calves and ankles, not to mention the bountiful bust that easily bulged under the fabric of the bath towel. Senpai's state of half-nakedness was displayed before my eyes, so dazzling that I almost couldn't stare directly. Although I had just died once and dared not accept all this, right now, I really feel like I would have no regrets even if I had to die straight away.

"Oh, please could you not stare at me continuously... I-I will feel very embarrassed..."

So Senpai will feel embarrassed? That makes sense... Thinking that, I looked at Senpai's face... Her face was blushing red to her ears to an astounding degree. In other words, Senpai was coming with a mood of "ufufu, my dear, I shall scrub your back for you! Ufu!", instead, she was thinking "so embarrassing, but I must do my best!"

I really didn't understand what motivation could drive Senpai to be willing to go so far.

But to me, simply the fact that "the extremely embarrassed Shiinamachi-senpai was willing to scrub my back" was enough to make me feel that my life's goal had been accomplished.

My life is without regrets now. I desperately suppressed my urge to raise my fist and cheer, trying hard to squeeze out words to converse with the embarrassed Senpai.

"Uh... Senpai, you're so pretty."

Right now, I did not want to do anything along the lines of "suppressing my own true feelings." Ever since transferring into this school, I decided I must express my emotions honestly. Hence, I said what was truly on my mind.

"Ooh... T-Thank you."

Senpai averted her gaze and covered the corner of her lip lightly with her hand... This motion was absolutely awesome.

Due to the action of her arm, her massive bust changed shape, bulging even more. Only a thin layer of cloth covered the critical spot that all men desired greatly to see. Of course I wanted to see it too, but if I kept staring, Senpai would probably feel very awkward.

At this moment, I totally had no idea what to do. I was even unable to sit down.

--Mind over body. I grasped as the last vestiges of rationality remaining in my heart, focused my mind and avoided letting a man's bestial nature make me carried away in excitement.

Losing my cool, almost overwhelmed by emotion, I might very well push Shiinamachi-senpai down on the spot. Or rather, the biggest problem is that doing that under this kind of conditions, I might actually be forgiven instead.

That said, the calmer part of my brain had a different feeling.

Despite feeling very embarrassed, Senpai was still doing her best to express her apology to me. Surely this must be because Senpai felt that she needed to compensate me for inviting me over but ending up getting me killed.

...Senpai had already experienced the scary act of getting killed. I really didn't want to violate her and add more to her mental trauma.

She had had enough. I hoped that Senpai could spend the remainder of today in a relaxed manner. That was the wish in my heart.

"Hoo... Okay. I've calmed down. Senpai, sorry, I got a little too excited just now."

"Oh, don't apologize... Umm... Thank you... Yes, I feel a little shy so could you turn your back towards me?"

"Sure. Thanks for offering to do this."

Senpai had offered to scrub my back after all, so naturally, I turned my back to her. It was admittedly a shame that I couldn't continue admiring Senpai's perfect body, but now that I've calmed down, I still turned myself slowly.

"Oh..."

Senpai cried out in surprise.

"There's a scar on your right shoulder..."

"Oh, I'm sorry for startling you."

Only then did I remember that there was cross-shaped scar on the side of my right shoulder as though it had been marked with a blade. Senpai must have saw that scar suddenly and felt startled.

"It was an old wound. I had many stitches back then."

"Looks like the wound was very deep at the time..."

I could feel Senpai lightly stroking the scar with her hand and I couldn't help but shudder once.

"Oh, my apologies. Does it hurt...?"

"No, it doesn't. It just surprised me so I shuddered. It's okay now."

I simply felt a little ticklish originally but for some reason, I suddenly felt a bit embarrassed.

"Okay... Sorry, I was too forward."

"Not at all. Don't say that."

Senpai seemed reassured. She exhaled lightly then touched my back.

I'll surely get way too excited if I focused my awareness excessively on this fact, so I decided to turn my gaze left and right, this resulted in...

I happened to see the mirror. The mirror apparently had anti-fog treatment and I was able to see a clear reflection of Shiinamachi-senpai behind me.

...To erase that greedy feeling in my heart, I hurriedly looked down.

"Ah... Fufu."

Senpai chuckled, slightly reassured.

She had apparently noticed that I was trying hard to suppress the urge to look at her.

To be honest, I really wanted to look, super wanted to look, wanting to look at her to the extreme.

But if it was to help Senpai feel reassured, I believe I can surely suppress the desire in my heart.

"Thank you, Jirou-kun."

This time, Shiinmachi-senpai placed her hand lightly on my back.

The feeling was a little cold and felt slightly ticklish.

"The blade stabbed... here, right?"

Senpai stroked my back, that spot was precisely opposite to my chest. That part still felt a little hot.

"Jirou-kun, sorry, it's all because I asked you to come to my room..."

"Don't say that, Senpai. I really don't mind at all. Besides, none of this feels real to me."

The intense pain at the time and the severe chill only lasted for but an instant.

At the time, I used the last of my strength to utter those last words... then lost consciousness.

That "death" experience was so brief and quick that it did not leave any resentment in my heart, naturally.

"But... I got you swept up in this incident without explaining anything beforehand... I was too impatient. I didn't explain anything to you at the start, so I'm sure right now, you are full of various questions, right?"

Indeed, Senpai didn't explain anything in detail to me today. As a result, it made me a little too excited. But at this moment, the situation is similarly quite exciting too.

"If possible, could you explain in detail to me now?"

"Very well. I only came in to explain everything to you ."

Senpai's voice sounded quite calm and stable. Although this was a bathroom, it felt quite suitable for asking Senpai all kinds of questions. This was probably what people called being completely open to each other, right? Hiding nothing from each other, displaying everything with no reservation... In this sense, there was no description more apt. Of course, Senpai was actually clad in a bath towel.

"First of all... Where should I begin?"

Senpai suddenly said softly with her hand on my back.

"Then... let's start with the reason you invited me to your room today."

That's right, I was confused from the start about what was going on.

"...Yes, good idea. Perhaps you might find all this to be quite ridiculous and impossible to believe, but... I hope you won't think I'm lying and will listen to me properly."

A ridiculous and impossible to believe incident had already happened.. And everything had happened to me, so how could I possibly not believe?

"Hmm..."

But to Senpai, I'm sure it's equally incomprehensible, right?

Not only was she stabbed to death suddenly, even the one she invited, me, was killed as well. I believe she herself must be quite shocked too... For some reason, I was starting to feel like I could understand why Senpai was so calm earlier.

As a result, no matter how unbelievable Senpai's next words were, I've already decided to accept her explanation for now.

"To be honest, tonight... I originally planned to tell you my secret, Jirou-kun."

"You mean matters related to monsters... what you just told me about?"

"Indeed."

I could feel Senpai's hand on my back slightly pushing harder.

"I am actually one of the Nightkin. Members of this race will only die when predetermined events happen. There are also people who call us 'Lords'."

I remember that the word "Lord" meant something like "king" or "sovereign."

"It is said that the Nightkin are a kind of life form similar to humans, always staying out of human sight, living in the world of the night, hiding among human crowds in their daily lives. Since time immemorial, the Nightkin has survived to modern day in this manner... Also, this race is apparently almost about to go extinct."

A life form similar to humans.

Throughout the time I have spent with Senpai, I found her no different from an ordinary human at all.

Feeling embarrassed in the bathroom, worrying for me all the time, and feeling troubled when trying to explain things.

The impression she gave off was clearly like an ordinary girl's, but...

"Hence, today--Not too long ago, I was assassinated and my heart stopped for a while. However, I was able to survive because I possess more potent self-healing powers than humans."

"Umm... Even if you get stabbed, severely damaging your heart... Your self-healing powers still works?"

Too shocking. If that really were true, then the race of Nightkin won't die under any circumstances, right?

"Looks like it works. Just now was my first time getting killed, so even I myself was very surprised... Also , everything happened perfectly by chance, your... *human blood* coincidentally splattered on my body. Perhaps because of that, it had a positive effect."

"My blood?"

"When I feel vitality bursting forth from someone's life... If that power carries within in some kind of powerful *thoughts and feelings*, those emotions can turn into a great power for we Nightkin to use."

Senpai spoke slightly shyly.

--Indeed, back then I was harboring powerful *thoughts and feelings* for Senpai. Due to that, when my fresh blood was spilt over Senpai's body, it was able to increase her self-healing powers, thereby saving her life?

But resurrecting just because of human blood splattering on oneself, that really resembled a vampire. Earlier, Senpai had said "There's no need to drink blood... But indeed, it is a bit similar to the type of monster you brought up." That was probably what she was referring to.

"So, what does the so-called safe day mean?"

Senpai had also mentioned that "If today weren't a safe day, dying on the spot would have been likely."

So... Before giving me the invitation, Senpai already knew she was not going to die.

"In fact, I already knew ahead of time that I will encounter an incident today involving death, but at the same time, I also knew that it will not entail my own death, so the meaning is equivalent to 'today is a safe day , don't worry'."

I see. So it's completely different to the kind of safe day I imagined.

I felt quite ashamed for mistaking Senpai's meaning. However, I really wished Senpai could understand how much that term would make guys blush and get excited uncontrollably... No, I guess it's more fitting of Shiinamachi-senpai's style for her to be unaware of these kinds of things.

"You knew ahead of time... That sounds something like a prophecy. Is this a power of the Nightkin?"

To be honest, I still found it hard to believe that Senpai was a life form of a different race. If Senpai were a weird girl who had a thing for this type of character background, I could still understand, but no, she's someone who never lies and never forces others to accept such pretentious ideas. As a result, I decided to accept her explanation wholly for now then analyze in detail afterwards.

"Oh no... That's not a power of the Nightkin but a special feature."

Saying that, Senpai fell silent for a while as though in a bit of a quandary.

Then apparently figuring out how to explain, she began to explain tirelessly.

"From the moment we are born, members of the Nightkin must act out their life according to a predetermined 'story', living according to the directions of the story... That's the kind of race we are."

"You must act out a story according to predetermined directions? Lemme see, that's like... a book, isn't it?"

"Yes. There exist books among us that only the Nightkin can read. Whenever one of our kind is born, a story will be selected from among them and assigned to the newborn Nightkin. Thereafter, that Nightkin must abide by the story's content and live according to its rules as well as die according to its rules. The greatest special feature is that if the event does not match the story's content, then it's almost impossible for us to die."

In other words, members of Senpai's race must follow the settings of the "story" starting from their birth and act out their life according to the story's content. If the death-causing incident does not match the timing in the story, then it's almost impossible for the Nightkin to die.

Just as indicated by the story Senpai was acting out, she did not die today. Because today was not her day to die. In other words, today was her safe day... So that's what happened, right?

I slowly began to understand the meaning of what Senpai had said previously.

"In other words... It's what people would call destiny?"

A prescribed and predetermined path. This could be called destiny, right?

"I guess this should be similar to what humans call destiny, but we are different from humans. During the period from birth until the end of their story, a Nightkin will stop aging after a certain age and will not die from any other causes of death."

In that case, this race definitely had their own unique special feature, different from vampire legends.

"My 'story' only started not too long ago. As long as I haven't finished acting out the role of the character in the story, I won't die. As a result, today is meant to be a day when 'I'll encounter an incident today involving death but won't die as a result', that is also why I was able to survive... Of course, I never expected in the beginning that the reason why I won't die... was because you would lose your life for coming here on my invitation, and that I survived because I received the powerful *thoughts and feelings* carried in your blood..."

Hearing Senpai mention "powerful thoughts and feelings", I felt a little embarrassed.

But in hindsight, my death ultimately helped Senpai, I'm so glad.

"In other words, whenever you're in a crisis, as long as I give my blood to you, Senpai, everything will be fine?"

I couldn't help but feel that it was a little similar to the concept of blood transfusions.

"Hmm, I don't think it has to be through blood... As long as some way is used to strengthen mental contact, it should be fine. However... A covenant of blood is indeed the most powerful method. Back then, a great volume of your blood entered my body through the wound on my chest, so..."

Saying that, Senpai exhaled lightly.

"Right now, flowing in my body is your blood that has assimilated with my own blood, Jirou-kun."

...Somehow, after hearing that, my heart fluttered for a bit.

To think that I've had mental contact with Shiinamachi-senpai, to the point of even establishing something so monumental as a covenant of blood?

My blood was currently flowing inside Senpai's body at the moment?

Hearing that, anyone would feel their heart pound uncontrollably, right?

"...C-Cough. No matter what, I think I've already understood why Senpai didn't die."

"Phew... I knew that the explanation just now must be hard to understand with common sense. At the same time, I understand that you are really willing to work hard to understand my words, Jirou-kun."

I felt a bit embarrassed that Senpai was being so considerate for me. After all, Senpai already came here on purpose to scrub my back. As a man, of course I must do everything in my power to try hard.

"Fufu. Actually, after dying and resurrecting, there was a short interlude... Basically, it took me quite a lot of effort to move you from my body where you had collapsed, Jirou-kun."

"Uwah... U-U-Umm... I'm so sorry, Senpai."

I had collapsed on Senpai's body when I died. At that moment, I was feeling quite satisfied but now it feels a bit embarrassing. However, so that was what the so-called "safe day" meant! Senpai's use of the term "safe day" turned out to be too technical, it was only natural that I would fail to understand her in the beginning.

Now I truly understood deeply that Shiinamachi-senpai really was a bit airheaded in this regard.

"Because of your help, I was able to revive... So in my panic, I decided I must save your life... Actually, I really wanted to obtain your consent first before resurrecting you... Sorry."

"No, that's no biggie at all. I'm the one who should thank you, Senpai, for surviving, being able to rise from the dead."

To be honest, I had already lost my life at that point. Even if Senpai tried to get my consent, I wouldn't have been able to answer her. The murderer's killing technique was too refined, I still think so even now.

Of course, I felt very happy that Senpai was willing to raise me from the dead.

However, I still couldn't help but find questions piling up more and more in my mind.

I guess I should be able to believe that Senpai belongs to a race called the Nightkin but I still found it hard to accept beings that could resurrect after being killed. But back then, I definitely saw with my own eyes that

Shiinamachi-senpai was collpased on the floor, dead, so I had no choice but to believe that this whole affair as indeed the truth.

However, if it really were true, then how on earth did I resurrect? I am just an ordinary person without Senpai's type of regeneration ability. Simply a fracture in my leg would take me between one and three months of recuperation to heal, let alone getting stabbed through the heart... After suffering that kind of wound, logically speaking, it should have been impossible to revive me.

"The reason why you are still living right now, Jirou-kun... is because I gave one of my 'gifts' to you."

"Senpai's... gift?"

"Yes. Those who obtain this gift will become *immortal*... Even if a blade stabs into your heart, or if the majority of your body gets blown away by an explosion, if you're forced to drink poison, you can still rise from death and recover to your original form. This is the power possessed by the gift I have given you... Apart from that, I absolutely couldn't think of any other way to resurrect you from your state of death back then."

This was absolutely absurd, totally ridiculous. To be able to resurrect someone who's already dead and even turn him immortal? Whether in the past or present, there shouldn't be any life form capable of that, right? Even gods in myths can't easily return to their original world after arriving at another world.

However, I definitely... personally experienced the process of dying and resurrection so this was something I could not refute at all.

"This is a power possessed by the Nightkin. We are able to pass along certain special powers to humans, giving the gifts we possess to people who can assist in our story. Once we pass it along, that gift will no longer exist within us, whereas the human who had obtained the gift will become the Nightkin's vassal."

Shiinamachi-senpai explained to me a little apologetically.

Vassal--Hearing this word, most people would probably think of subordinates or followers.

"Vassals are usually called 'Knights' as well. As a result , a Nightkin can continue building their story together with their vassals. A vassal can be the Nightkin's coworker, friend, knight, relative and sometimes even their lover or spouse. Through this process, the Nightkin eventually completes their life's story."

Due to the Nightkin's vassals playing this kind of role, in terms of the meaning of "night", that was why the vassals were called Nights by others; or perhaps just as Senpai mentioned earlier, vassals could play the role of a knight, protecting the Nightkin, hence they were called " Knights." I've heard Senpai mention the other names for the "Nightkin" and "vassals" but only now did I finally realize that their alternative names actually carried two different layers of meanings.

The Nightkin were like sovereigns in stories, hence they were addressed as "Lord". In addition, a Nightkin must travel along the path prescribed by the story, which can be called a "Road", which sounds similar as well.[1]

To Senpai, I am like a companion to spend the dark nights together, hence "Nights" while at the same time, I am the knight by her side, which is a position called the " Knights".

So that's the meaning.

--Vassals could become the Nightkin's lover or spouse. .. This fact really made my heart pound uncontrollably.

It felt like words coming from a girl who loved to daydream.

My entire person was about to plunge into narcissism. Perhaps that was truly the wish in Senpai's heart.

If that really was the case... I feel myself getting more and more motivated.

"...Suddenly telling you these things, it must be hard for you to believe in an instant."

Senpai timidly tried to move away her hand that was on my back.

--Indeed, suddenly hearing someone say this kind of stuff would be really hard to believe. If she really asked me this moment whether I really believed everything from the bottom of my heart, I would surely say that I actually still have some doubts. On the other hand, my current situation was clearly telling me that all this was the truth beyond a doubt.

For example, as soon as I recalled... The current situation where Shiinamachi-senpai did not actually die.

Back then, I personally saw the wound on her chest from something stabbing straight through, so I definitely cannot explain how she is alive now. Furthermore, I also saw the large amount of blood flowing everywhere so it makes it even harder to explain how she didn't die.

Next... The current fact that I was not killed also fully proves this reality.

I didn't witness by my own eyes what had caused the impact behind me so I could still conclude that perhaps I wasn't stabbed; nevertheless, I did see for certain at the time that a blade tip had pierced out of my chest, this was totally irrefutable. My chest definitely bled and I certainly saw a blade's tip.

In other words, putting aside whether I am dead or alive... At least I can be certain of one fact: a long blade had stabbed me in the back, penetrating and exiting from my chest.

Then I lost consciousness. Even if that attack had not caused a fatal wound, surely I would have died from excessive blood loss eventually.

--Based on past experience, I was very clear on this point.

Summing up, Shiinamachi-senpai and I were murdered.

This was the truth... And after that, right now, we are truly alive. This was also the undeniable truth.

--Hence, Shiinamachi-senpai was speaking the truth.

Based on the current situation, it should be fine to treat all this as reality. Even if stuff like the Nightkin explanation and the part about powers possessed by vassals was a lie, for me at this particular point in time, it didn't matter at all. After all, I cannot explain the whole thing using the common sense logic in my mind, so taking a skeptical stance was pointless.

In that case, it would be better to believe Shiinamachi-senpai fully.

That's all I could do for now.

"I believe. I believe in what you told me, Shiinamachi-senpai."

"Eh... Jirou-kun...?"

"Of course I'm very surprised and I find certain parts very hard to understand. For example, there's the fact that Senpai isn't human, Senpai possesses certain powers, Senpai gave me one of those powers... I really have trouble understanding these parts."

"Yes... You have a point..."

"However, I believe you, Senpai. How should I put this? ...Senpai, for the sake of explaining everything, you were still willing to do your best and enter the bathroom despite clearly feeling very embarrassed, putting your utmost effort to explain to me. Furthermore, you still told me all that even knowing I might not believe you. That's why I believe you, Senpai."

"...Jirou-kun..."

Senpai's voice sounded a bit shaky.

"That's why, Senpai, please rest assured. I don't want you to be worried."

That's right. No matter what situation I'm in, no matter what the truth actually is, to me, the most important thing is whether Senpai feels reassured.

To me currently, this was the most important thing.

All I cared about was whether Shiinamachi-senpai was able to smile as before.

That's right, that alone was enough.

"...Jirou-kun, you're really so kind."

After saying those words, just like that, Senpai... hugged me, pressing tightly against my back.

The extremely concrete feeling coming from my back, through the fabric, I could even feel that bulging body part getting squeezed and compressed.

"S-S-S-S-Senpai!?"

"The reason why I invited you was because... I felt that you are a very kind person."

Hearing these words, the sense of upheaval in my heart swiftly calmed down.

--My kindness is actually all an act.

Even when placed in this kind of situation, calm thoughts still existed in a certain part of my mind. I was still able to get a clear grasp of the situation, even to the point of choosing what words and sentences to respond.

However, as long as it helped Shiinamachi-senpai feel reassured, even feigned calmness was fine.

"The reason why invited you over was to ask you... ask you to accept this power for my sake, and ask you to assist in my story. It's just that the sequence got changed a little..."

...I see.

I guessed that Senpai's original intention was to call me to her room, then explain to me what she had just told me... Then give me her request and ask me to make a decision.

What she wanted to ask me was "please accept the power of immortality and help construct my story."

It's just that an unexpected incident occurred, in the end causing her to have no choice but to first decide to raise me from the dead.

This matter was surely eating away at Senpai's heart. She probably felt quite guilty. Because of that, she endured her feelings of embarrassment to come to the bathroom to explain everything to me.

"Senpai, even if this incident hadn't happened, I still would've accepted your request."

I really hoped Senpai could feel assured so I told her my feelings honestly.

In fact, I was originally harboring feelings of "no matter what Senpai's wish is, I will gladly accept it" which is why I came here tonight.

Of course, I do feel a little disappointed since things happened completely different from what I imagined.

However, I really feel extremely proud that Senpai was willing to choose someone like me.

"Jirou-san, I am truly grateful to you..."

Senpai murmured as though a great load was lifted off her shoulders, her voice mixed with a sigh of relief.

Warm breath reached the back of my shoulder, I couldn't help but shudder once.

"...For some reason, I've always felt that you probably would accept... Somehow, as long as I asked, you would surely agree to help me... Sorry, I can't believe I was having such selfish thoughts."

...Looks like my feelings of admiration for Senpai had already been exposed.

Sigh, in that case, a conclusion definitely could be reached soon.

"Oh, by the way, after receiving my power, a pattern resembling an emblem should have appeared somewhere on your body."

"Oh yeah, it happens to be near my chest."

In order to show Senpai the pattern on my chest, I was just about to puff out my chest, just at that moment--

"Kyah!"

Senpai made a panicking sound.

At the same time, the bath towel originally in contact with me fluttered to the floor!

"......Uh!"

I immediately closed my eyes! But in fact, I really wanted to look, super wanted to look, desperately wanted to look.

But if I did that, surely Senpai would feel very troubled. So--I must endure!

"Eh? Oh... Fufu. Jirou-kun, it's okay."

--It's okay?

"But Senpai... Umm..."

"...Just to be safe, I'm wearing a swimsuit underneath."

I opened my eyes slightly... Through the mirror, I saw Shiinamachi-senpai clutching the bath towel with an embarrassed look on her face. Worn on her pale skin was a strapless red swimsuit.

"I was thinking of going out with the library monitors next time to have fun at the pool... So I bought a swimsuit beforehand."

"I... see."

But seeing Shiinamachi-senpai standing there on the spot, clutching the bath towel with an embarrassed look while dressed in a swimsuit, that sight was too stimulating for me indeed.

I couldn't help but feel troubled what I should do next, then--

"Kaguya, have you two progressed to the kind of relationship where you can take baths together?"

I heard a girl's voice that I had never heard before. It felt very lifeless and monotone. Hearing that voice, I almost jumped straight up in surprise. I frantically turned my head and found a girl peering into the bathroom. She was dressed in school uniform with a lab coat on top of her uniform. Her hair was extremely long.

"Eh, ah, umm..."

"Okay--Situation understood. I predict that the two of you will now enter the sex scene. Please go ahead."

"Eh? W-What sex scene!? W-What do you mean by ' please go ahead'!?"

"I have already seen it, so please don't mind me."

"O-Of course I mind! S-Sorry, Jirou-kun, I have to leave the bathroom first!"

Shiinamachi-senpai looked very nervous and agitated. Then she left the bathroom like a gust of wind.

While running away, Senpai's little swimsuit-clad butt really was too adorable--I couldn't help but think that.

O-Oh right. Who was this girl who had suddenly appeared?

"Kaguya escaped confirmed-By the way, Monjirou."

"Eh, ah, you're addressing me?"

A girl I've never met suddenly called me by my nickname, greatly surprising me.

"Are you really okay like that?"

"What?"

The girl swiftly pointed at me. Where she pointed was my--naked lower body.

"--Sorry."

I frantically turned my back to the girl.

"No problem."

"N-No problem?"

"Absolutely none."

Absolutely no problem...?

The girl, who had one eye obscured by her bangs, simply maintained her aloof attitude all along.

However, why did she keep staring at me, all the way until I had put on my clothes?

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

"Nice to meet you. In terms of names to my knowledge , I am called Yatono Shiki. Currently belonging to class 1-B. Please address me with familiarity from now on as Shiki or Shiki-tan."

She wants me to address her with familiarity? But I can't feel the slightest familiarity or warmth from her tone of voice and attitude!

"Then, Shiki-san..."

"Please address me as Shiki or Shiki-chwan and remember to use a more familiar tone of voice."

"...Shiki."

"Very good, your turn to introduce yourself."

Seeing me suffer so much for a manner of address, Shiinamachi-senpai couldn't help but laugh secretly to herself on the side.

"Shiki, I'm in class 2-A and like Senpai, I'm a library monitor as well. My name is Sakuradamon Jirou."

"I know that already, Monjirou."

Because she kept using my nickname, I kept getting the feeling that she had no idea what my real name was, but I decided to refrain from retorting about that. Perhaps this might make her act more friendly to me? Hopefully...

"I am Shiinamachi Kaguya. I believe the two of you already know that."

"Yes, Kaguya, I know that already. From now on, the three of us are friends."

The three of us were sitting on seat cushions around a table in Senpai's room, introducing ourselves in turn. Shiki had a lace-like decoration coiled around her hair. She was also wearing a large lab coat that was too big for her with both hands still stuck in the pockets while she was sitting. From appearance, she was truly quite a distinctive girl.

"So, Monjirou, have you had enough lovey-dovey intimacy with Shiinamachi Kaguya already?"

Shiki spoke with a very indifferent attitude, her tone of voice as flat as an automated speech system. However, the content of her words were quite crass.

"W-We weren't acting lovey-dovey..."

Shiiinamachi-senpai's face went all red immediately.

"Well then, I should describe the two as inseparable then?"

"We're not!"

Shiinamachi-senpai swiftly denied. How rare to hear her talk in such a loud voice. Immediately, she also seemed to realize she was shouting uncharacteristically loud and hastily covered her face in her hands.

"On the other hand, Monjirou was showing a 'totally seduced' look on his face."

"To be honest, that is the truth."

"Jirou-kun, you're so annoying..."

Senpai's gaze carried a sliver of reprimand but it felt unexpectedly comfortable. Teasing Shiinamachi-senpai really was too fun. I must pay more attention and try not to make it a habit.

"Kaguya red-faced confirmed. Condition normal, congratulations."

"Shiki-san, y-you're really so a-annoying..."

"What I mean is that your body's condition is normal, as well as that your cheeks are red."

Shiki turned her face towards me. I wasn't sure if she was staring at me because her bangs were covering her face, but it felt like she was hoping I'd give a comment about her lame pun[2] just now. Very well.

"That's really da bomb."

I deliberately used outdated slang to praise her and even made a thumbs-up. Shiki proceeded to do a thumbs-up and nodded.

I see. Perhaps I do know how to get closer to her.

But who the heck was this girl?

There was this indifferent air about her that made it difficult to get along with her but at the same time, she seemed like quite the joker. From appearance down to her words and behavior, her entire person was full of mystery.

"By the way, brother."

"Are you addressing me?"

"So our intimacy has not progressed to brother-sister levels? Then I have misspoken."

"Oh, that's not what I meant."

But it's true that our relationship isn't that close.

"It's fine even if you don't force a brother-sister type of intimacy with me on purpose..."

"Sure, darling."

"That's way too much of a jump. Could you just call me by name normally?"

"Very well, Monjirou."

She still insisted on calling me by my nickname. Perhaps she really treated my nickname as my real name. At this moment, I decided to give up on feeling bothered by it.

"Yes, Shiki, what's up?"

"How much information have you obtained from Kaguya about the current situation?"

Shiki cocked her head slightly, revealing a bit of her right eye. It was a very clear blue eye. Although her name sounded Japanese, perhaps she was actually a mixed child.

"How much... What's a good way of putting it...?"

"For example, three sizes?"

"How could I ask her something like that?"

"By my deductions, she probably will accept this kind of question from you."

I couldn't help but look at Shiinamachi-senpai with anticipation.

"I-I'm not going to answer!"

Completely flustered, Shiinamachi-senpai's presence was truly too soothing for the heart.

However... Judging from the words of this girl named Shiki, she seemed to know about the whole story already.

With her bangs covering an eye, it was almost impossible to read her face... Perhaps this was also deliberate on her part.

"...Monjirou, do you have any questions? Have you acknowledged me as your target for lust?"

"No, I'm sorry, it's very hard for me to feel that way towards someone I'm meeting for the first time."

"Really? Then I should learn more from Kaguya and take care to increase my potential as a woman."

What the heck was potential as a woman? This term seemed quite out of date. However, if it was interpreted as "honing feminine charms" then it's true that learning from Senpai as a role model would be right.

"So, Shiki, what's your relationship with Senpai?"

"Physical relationship."

"Pfft!"

I couldn't help but spurt out air. Too dangerous. If I happened to be drinking, it would have been a mess.

"S-Shiki-san!?"

Senpai looked so frantic that she was almost about to burst into tears.

"It's already past midnight so it just happened to be perfect for a joke suited to late night hours."

"That's really bad for the heart."

I couldn't help it... I almost started to imagine Senpai and Shiki in this and that kind of scene.

"Right now, this very moment, we have already concluded that there is no problem even if Monjirou's heart stopped. But this fact hasn't been verified yet, so I hope you'll assist in experiments involving stopping the heart."

"...I'm very sorry. I don't agree with conducting this experiment."

"Is that... so...?"

Shiki seemed quite disappointed.

...Hmm?

In other words, Shiki already knew about me resurrecting because Senpai saved me? And she also knew that I had become immortal now?

"So, Monjirou, I will make a deal with you. If you agree with the experiment, I will provide my own body to you. How do you feel about that?"

"...What?"

"Shiki-san, no, not allowed!"

Shiinamachi-senpai called out with a face filled with panic to stop her but I was stunned on the spot, unable to understand Shiki's meaning.

Seeing Senpai so flustered, in other words... It was definitely that meaning, right?

"Is this another late night joke?"

"I don't deny it. It is a subject that I find relatively more interesting."

"...I-I see..."

"Yes."

"No means no!"

Senpai stared at me with reprimanding eyes, making me feel a slight sense of chill.

Sigh, that's right. She's only a girl I just met, how could I possibly accept her body? And those terms of exchange, for me to cooperate with the experiment to see if my heart will stop, I absolutely can't do that.

"Ahem. So, Shiki, why did you come to Shiinamachi-senpai's room at this time?"

"That's what you're curious about?"

What else do you think I'm curious about?

"I was thinking I might have a chance to catch a glimpse of your lovey-dovey moments, so I waited a while before coming here. However, I never expected the two of you to progress to the intimacy of taking a bath together on the first night."

"T-That's because! I-It's not like that... Ugh!"

"Is there any inaccuracy or deviation in my assessment ?"

"Hmm... Uh..."

Seeing Shiinamachi-senpai tongue-tied in nervousness, I really wanted to take her home directly for a good loving.

"Actually, I didn't do anything."

"Roger that. I have understood that Monjirou is a ' useless man'."

"Goof!"

This comment struck viciously at my heart, making but double over in pain.

"Wah, Jirou-kun..."

"Senpai, i-it's okay..."

Indeed, under those circumstances, to think that I totally failed to do anything in that sense, perhaps I really can be considered a "useless man". However, I never expected this much psychological damage I'd feel from having a girl point this out to my face.

"Shiki-san is the same as you, both vassals to help and assist in my story. In other words, I have likewise passed on one of my gifts to Shiki-san."

"Yes, I have received the gift known as Satori. Here on, my job is to assist Kaguya for the rest of my life."

Satori.

If I remembered right, this was the name of a mind-reading monster dwelling somewhere deep in the mountains.

Since Senpai was able to pass to me a powerful gift of resurrection, then the Satori gift received by this Shiki girl probably was a power that shouldn't be underestimated, right?

Indeed-She seemed to be able to *read other people's thoughts* directly.

Let me test by thinking things in my mind. Oh right--I should give them those two puddings I bought earlier, right? Or should I just take them home...

While pondering this dilemma, I stared at Shiki.

Okay, will she be able to read my thoughts or not...?

"I see."

Looking into my eyes, Shiki nodded with a calm face.

She does have the power to *read minds*!?

"I can feel your burning gaze. You are suggesting that I pay upfront the reward for the heart-stopping experiment first, aren't you?"

"The hell I am!?"

"Eh, Jirou-kun, I can't believe you were thinking that just now...?"

"Senpai, I wasn't! Because she said her power was called Satori, I was thinking she could read minds!"

"Oh... I see, that's what's going on. Phew..."

Senpai placed her hand on her chest in relief.

"I see. I understand now. My Satori power is not mind reading, please relax."

"I see."

"Hence, feel free to use Kaguya or me for fantasizing."

"What did you say!?"

"Of course, I am referring to the kind of fantasizing you do late at night."

I can't believe she can say such outrageous things nonchalantly...

"?"

Shiinamachi-senpai had apparently not caught on to her meaning. In that case, there shouldn't be a problem, right?

However, this Shiki girl will keep saying things nonchalantly with a sexual harassment flavor if she's left alone.

I must be more careful to avoid falling into her traps...

"Like me, Shiki is a Nightkin's vassal... Right?"

"Yes. At least as far as I can recall, I have only passed a gift to Shiki alone before tonight, no one else."

"As far as you can recall?"

I stared in puzzlement at Senpai and Shiki.

"Kaguya lost her memory."

"What?"

I stared intently at Senpai's face.

"Actually... I can only remember things that happened in the past three years. Although I know that I am one of the Nightkin and also have common knowledge on life skills, I have almost no recollection on what I've done in the past..."

"Really...?"

Senpai's usual attitude towards life was too natural, so I've always thought... It was the calm and composed mindset of someone who had lived a long life.

"Oh, but I still remember how to live, how days ought to be spent in school, and the content of my story... etc. It feels like I've only lost a certain portion of my memories."

"We can speculate that this is the result of a type of memory-sealing special ability. Kaguya also cannot remember who else she has passed gifts to other than myself. Nightkin typically possess five gifts but just before Kaguya passed Satori to me, she only had three gifts left, one of them being the immortality you now possess."

"Then counting from that, Senpai only has one gift left ?"

"Yes. If I pass my final gift to someone, I will become no different from an ordinary person."

The corners of Shiinamachi-senpai's lips showed a faint smile.

How should I say this? I felt deeply that Senpai must have lived through such a tough life in the past.

Even so, for her still to be able to show such a gentle smile, she really was a very strong person.

Yes, it's decided, I must fulfill my role properly as Senpai's vassal.

I vowed secretly in the bottom of my heart.

"Senpai, I will surely do my best."

"Oh Jirou-kun..."

Senpai blushed, her eyes tearful.

I was really happy to make Senpai so touched. Since Senpai had chosen me as her vassal, then I must assist her to complete her story properly. I sincerely hoped that .

"I see. Now it looks like the two of you are about to enter the sex scene."

"There's none of that, okay!?"

However, Shiki, a vassal like me, remained unfazed, her speech still full of sexual harassment.

It really was a little exasperating that a young girl would have this kind of hobby.

"So... Shiki, why did you come running here in the middle of the night?"

"I usually borrow Kaguya's bathroom at a fixed time at night."

"Hmm? So you live near the school?"

"I live in the school. The computer lab management room is the personal room exclusive to me."

Students were only allowed into the computer lab during IT class, so I never noticed there was a management room... I carefully searched my memories and there seemed to be a door behind the lectern at the front of the computer lab.

But she definitely said just now... She lives there. After all, Shiinamachi-senpai also lives in this kind of place, so I decided to alter my way of thinking. Perhaps Shiki is living there for some sort of special reaosn.

"Shiinamachi-senpai, may I ask..."

While thinking about how I should pose the question, I looked at Senpai. Only now did I realize that Senpai was looking alternately at Shiki and me, showing a "oh right, I just remembered" kind of expression.

"Jirou-kun, it was Shiki-san who suggested me to choose you."

"Eh?"

"Perhaps you might find this a shocking truth, but Kaguya is not lying. Ever since you entered this school, I've been deeply interested in you. As a result, I am also very familiar with *various things* about you."

She particularly emphasized those words, making me almost react to them. I hastily pushed my glasses.

Various things. This term gave me a kind of bad feeling.

"For example, people's pet name for you is Monjirou."

"Eh? Oh, okay, so you mean that? Uh, I did feel kinda weird when you addressed me with that on our first meeting..."

"This moniker is reportedly quite popular with the students."[3]

I was getting confused by her again. Stared at by her blue eye whose corner was slightly downward drooping, I found it difficult to refute her.

The example given just now was perhaps by chance a conclusion obtained by combining "popular with the students" and "moniker" so this mystery was totally pointless and I decided to respond to her coldly.

"Of course, it's okay if you want to call me that."

After all, Fujisato and Kuhou called me that as well. An extra person wouldn't matter.

Just like that, I totally underestimated her.

"Apart from that, I have also acquired full information on your past and family bloodline."

This sentence that she threw out casually caused my view to go dark.

--After that, I placed my hand on my vanity glasses in order to flick the switch in my consciousness.

These glasses worked as a tool of the mind to control my consciousness. Whenever my mind was shaken, I would push my glasses again. Then, if I wanted to make my consciousness sharper, keener and more focused, I would take off my glasses.

Just now, this Shiki fellow said she knew about my past and family bloodline.

In other words, she already what kind of environment I was raised in and what kind of training I've undergone, and she knew that I have walked through a path of utterly inhumane education.

In that case--

I couldn't help but move my left hand.

"Faint killing intent confirmed. Please relax. I only investigated and corroborated *these facts* purely for Kaguya's sake. It's part of my job."

She clearly sensed my killing intent yet she still kept her hands planted in the pockets of her lab coat. This really concerned me... But since she was Shiinamachi-senpai's vassal, then there was nothing weird about her being in charge of gathering information .

But she said that she had become interested in me ever since the first day of school. Shiki had been observing my every move from the beginning but conversely, I knew nothing about Shiki at all.

In other words, she was a person who was capable of lurking in the shadows to investigate all sorts of information.

"Your skills, innate disposition, behavior... as well as current attitude. Based on the aforementioned characteristics, I judged you to be the safest person for Kaguya."

Her tone of voice remained robotic and it made me hesitate on how far I should trust her.

"Oh, Jirou-kun... Umm, how should I say this...? Actually, I've always felt that you're very reliable, you know? Then, basically... Shiki-san has been taking care of me for a long time, helping me with many things..."

Slightly incoherently, Senpai tried to smooth things over between Shiki and me.

Senpai was probably trying to clarify to me: If I really had to discern between friend and foe, Shiki was definitely on my side.

That being said, I still couldn't believe what Shiki said so easily. Even if Shiinamachi-senpai considered Shiki her comrade, but Shiki did investigate me in secret without my knowledge after all so it's only natural that I'd feel wary towards her. If she knew my family background as well, then most likely, even my family might run into danger.

"I have already understood that you are very guarded. Currently, I am thinking about what means to help lower your wariness..."

Shiki looked down and seemed to be thinking deeply. That caused her bangs to nearly cover her entire face.

"I got it. Monjirou, please rape me."

"What what what!?"

Too unexpected, I couldn't help but cry out in surprise.

"As long as you violate me, pouring your desires into me, disciplining me to make me your slave, that way you should be able to trust me."

"I'm not going to do that, okay!?"

"J-Jirou-kun...?"

"I won't, absolutely not! Even faced with Shiinamachi-senpai who I admire, I won't do a single thing that crosses the line, okay!? How could someone like me do that kind of thing to a girl I just met for the first time!?"

That's right, I am a "useless man" after all!

No, at least allow me to call myself a "gentleman" or a "person who respected women"!

"So, the next time this happens, please do make your move to try it."

"Make my move to try what!?"

I couldn't help but raise my voice and retort.

Shiki tilted her head and stared straight back at me with her blue eye.

"In other words, I have prepared myself to be violated by you any time."

"What kind of preparation is that...? Sigh, very well, I get it, I'll believe you for now."

"Then as evidence of my trust in you..."

Shiki began to remove her lab coat.

"Wait wait, you don't need to do this, don't take off your clothes!"

"Really...?"

Why did she look so disappointed?

In any case, let's leave it at that.

To be honest, given the current circumstances which were impossible to grasp, taking reckless action would be too dangerous. Especially when facing Shiki, I was already acting many steps behind her. Plus the fact that I was even killed not too long ago, it would be best to abandon the delusion that I could seize initiative right now.

In order to calm myself, I swiftly pushed my vanity glasses up instead of taking it off.

'First of all, you must accept the current situation then think of countermeasures. If you start off in a disadvantaged position, then you must get everything back to zero then slowly try to gain the upperhand.'

I recalled the advice from the mother who had already left me.

"Monjirou changing thought patterns confirmed. Monjirou possesses quite an excellent innate disposition."

"Oh... But it's because you possess this kind of characteristic, Jirou-kun, that's why I wanted to request your help."

Hearing Senpai say that, my feelings were quite conflicted.

The truth was that I was studying hard because I didn't want people to think I had that kind of characteristic. In order to erase my past, I've worked hard to make myself live an exceedingly ordinary school life, trying to enjoy myself in it.

Since the secret was already exposed, then there was nothing to do about it.

Shiinamachi-senpai was not human but a Nightkin.

Shiki was a the lab coat-wearing girl who lived in school, also a vassal at the same time.

And I had a family background that was unmentionable to outsiders.

For such a bizarre trio to gather together, it would not be surprising if anything happened.

"So, yes... Since you have calmed down... Let's cut to the chase, shall we?"

Shiinamachi-senpai clapped once, prompting Shiki and I to nod in response.

It was finally time to broach the main subject.

Why did Shiinamachi-senpai get murdered?

And why did I get stabbed to death as well?

Who exactly was the perpetrator... And what was the motive?

"First of all... Jirou-kun has already become my companion, so if you're willing, umm... I wish to hear about your love life in the past."

...

"What?"

"I also wish to confirm with you, what went through your mind when you heard Kaguya say the words "safe day"? Just to be safe, may I confirm the contents of your bag?"

"No way, that'll really bother me!"

"Based on the information at my fingertips, speculating according to the thought processes in Jirou's mind currently and the delusional imagination of a high school boy's, inside the bag should be..."

"Ugh...!"

I never expected *that* to put me in such an awkward predicament. No, things are not like that!

"Say! We still haven't discussed why Shiinamachi-senpai and I were murdered or brought up anything about the perpetrator!"

"Hmm... Those issues are naturally quite important, but let's discuss them later, okay? Jirou-kun, is that okay with you..."

"I also second discussing those issues later."

Leaving the real stuff to discuss last!?

"No, you two, umm..."

"Eh, umm... Jirou-kun, no way... You're unwilling to talk...?"

Shiinamachi-senpai's curiosity was written all over her face.

What on earth was this? Did the Nightkin have different values compared to humans?

However, if I think about it in a positive manner, this Nightkin here before my eyes chose me as her vassal, which meant that perhaps to a certain degree, she wished to understand more of what I was thinking.

"My love life is totally not interesting at all..."

"Nothing of that sort. Jirou-kun, you're a very interesting person!"

Should I be happy that Senpai has that kind of impression of me? Well, she's surely saying that to me out of kindness, so I really ought to be happy.

"Yes. Since I recommended you to become Kaguya's vassal, that means you possess the ordinary characteristics of high school boys."

I feel that these words carried no kindness to speak of... Was I imagining things?

...When the heck were we going to enter the main subject of discussion?

The night was growing late. First of all--I guess I must disclose my shameful past. I've never had any experience going out with a girl, not even the slightest bit popular with girls at all.

Tohoho...

Chapter 2 A-Part - Murder and Gift

■Search Results for "killer":

- a type of profession where one specializes in accepting jobs to murder other people, thereby obtaining money from the client.
- does not include civil servants who perform executions due to their job responsibilities.
- someone who murders in exchange for money. A professional hitman.
- a type of profession where one accepts a client's killing request to eliminate a target.

"Fujisato, in actual fact, my family has been professional killers for generations."

This was the next day after I was met with a rare death experience.

During the break between my summer supplementary lessons, I told class rep Fujisato the truth.

"Eh? Really?"

She opened her eyes wide and made a surprised look then cocked her head doubtfully and expressed:

"If that were true, it'd really be quite frightening! Ahaha!"

Then she smiled happily at me.

Indeed, that's how a normal person is supposed to react.

No matter who I disclosed my secret to, whether classmates or library monitors, no one treated it as the truth.

The profession of being a killer sounded way too farfetched in the modern world.

"However, professional killers do seem to exist in other countries. I don't know if they're family businesses but in criminal organizations like mafias or gangs, they are supposed to hire professional killers, right?"

Like right now, I would occasionally hear the other person talk to me about superficial knowledge from movies or the internet. This was, of course, also how high school students were supposed to react.

"No really, I'm serious. My mother is a killer too."

"Wow, so surprising, Monjirou, could it be that you... have '8th grade syndrome'? I see now! But we're supposed to have graduated from 8th grade syndrome by the time we reach this age!"

"It's not like that. Not only that, I'm currently immortal as well. I was already murdered once yesterday by someone."

"Ahaha! I see now. You're talking about what you dreamt last night? Last night, I was chased by a bunch of zombies then bang bang bang, I gunned them all down!"

Fujisato dismissed my words with a smile. Even I couldn't help but feel like everything was a lie.

Was last night's events a dream? I actually hoped so but every time I checked the mark on my chest, I felt a little disappointed and realized that everything was real.

"But I'm quite surprised that you actually have such violent dreams?"

"Of course I make that type of dream! When working at the convenience store, I always meet groups of delinquents. Middle schoolers with dyed blond hair frequently gather at the store where I work. They love to crowd near the entrance and don't throw away their trash. It's their fault that I have to spend a lot of effort cleaning up each time. If I had an air gun, I'd really want to shoot at them and drive them all away."

"I see. Do they shoplift or do other bad things?"

"Hmm, things are not bad in this regard. After they enter the store, they act unexpectedly polite, actually."

The way I see it, they totally have a thing for Fujisato, right?

But as the convenience store's poster girl, I was quite relieved that Fujisato was only confronted with small troubles of this sort.

"By the way, Monjirou, have you ever thought about changing your current self?"

"Eh? Why do you ask?"

"Weren't you talking about professional killers, immortal heroes and stuff like that just now? Usually, people who wants to become those kinds of things are those who feel dissatisfied with their current life!"

"Changing my current self..."

If I had to say, I'm actually in the post-transformation state right now.

--Under my mother's instruction, most of what I learnt from early childhood was *how do people die* and *how to move so as to kill people more efficiently*. Hence, in my youth , I almost never came into contact with normal values that most people are supposed to have.

Naturally, the family name Sakuradamon was a fake but my family does indeed hold a "license to kill". This is a license approved by a public agency and its authorization coverage was "the bearer is authorized engage in legal murder according to their personal judgment." My family has held this license for generations. In other words, my family was like assassins , in charge of eliminating the nation's enemies or spies from hostile countries. Supposedly, my mother was even a "master" with exceptional ability among the family.

The day I reached fifteen years of age, my mother suddenly vanished. Abandoned by my mother, I started living together with my little sister. Raised by my grandfather, my little sister had grown up peacefully as a normal person.

My past self never had a shred of emotion in my heart, like a specially designed machine made to *kill*. Rather than emotions, I prioritized logic and reason, to the point that I didn't think I needed to conform to society.

However, my little sister cherished me and took great pains to educate me. She told me what boys of my age were supposed to think about, to be interested in and the correct way to think like an average "person"...

After spending two years, I finally gained ordinary common sense and understood what the desires and values of high school boys at my age should have. I also know that I was more easily touched than boys of the same age and my heart wavered more easily, especially in sex-related matters, my thoughts were particularly unstable, often unable to make correct decisions.

However, this part still counted within the parameters of a normal high school boy's behavior.

When wearing glasses, I can face my emotions and soul with honesty. While apply this sort of self-suggestion to myself, through the expenditure of long durations, I finally gained *the soul a normal human was supposed to have*.

Like this, when even my little sister guaranteed that I was like "an ordinary and normal person", only after that did I happily transfer into this exceedingly ordinary prefectural high school.

Of course, I was only able to complete this kind of personality remodeling partially because my mother had left a certain "mechanism" in my body before she left, which was how I was able to successfully come this far to this day--

"Would a highly skilled killer have some kind of powerful finishing move?"

My hand almost reached for my right shoulder involuntarily. Luckily, this sentence made me stop my movements.

"Hmm, yeah! But using a finishing move might lead to death so normally, they're sealed up."

"Ahaha, that feels like what I've often heard! It'd be so interesting if this type of story really were true!"

Sounding like a story but actually true, so true that it almost felt like a lie.

Perhaps the world was made up of all sorts of things like these.

Even this high school was the same. I used to think it was an ordinary prefectural high school but after transferring here did I find out that this place turned out to have Senpai who's from another race as well as that underclassman girl with a polite attitude yet bizarre behavior.

"However, I understand your kind of wish to transform. Sometimes I do wonder if the way I am is really okay? I'll be graduating next year and the year after that, I might become a university student. Sometimes I feel anxious and can't help but worry... Is it really okay for me to continue living life in such a laid back manner?"

"Hmm... About the future... I've never thought about it , actually."

"To be honest, I've always worried about whether I'll be able to handle exams, studying and I have no idea what university entrance exams are like... Ooh... Monjirou, you've got such a smart brain, you probably don't have to worry about this kind of stuff, right?"

Ordinary high schoolers all had to work hard and study and take exams to maintain their academic performance but my level of working hard apparently far surpassed the level of "ordinary high schoolers". A certain cram school had held a nation-wide mock exam back in the beginning of June and I took the exam. I ended up accidentally getting number one in the nation.

Actually, I wasn't planning on standing out that much but high schoolers of this age always had massive emotional ups and downs on this kind of ranking. My little sister was so happy that she even cooked red bean rice to celebrate, this made me quite happy.

"Starting from the second term, mathematics, physics and chemistry will get more difficult, so it's necessary to work harder."

"Ooh... I'm recalling bad memories... You're right, the subjects will get more and more hard... Tohoho--"

Fujisato only made a "tohoho" sound whenever she felt very helpless and demoralized.

With shoulders slumped, her dejected look was very interesting so occasionally, I would feel the urge to imitate her motion.

Cling clong clang...

"Oh, it's time to return to our seats. By the way, Monjirou, would you like to have lunch together after this period? I brought two packed lunches from the convenience store this morning."

"Oh, thank you very much, then I'll accept your kind offer."

"Nagi-chan already invited me this morning to have lunch at the student cafeteria, so it won't be the two of alone. Is that okay?"

"Having lunch alone with you would be nice but I'm very happy to have Kuhou with us as a trio as well."

"Ahaha, thank you for your compliment! Yes, then see you later!"

Fujisato ran back to her seat, her soft sleek hair fluttering.

While watching her from behind, something completely unrelated went through my mind.

--Looks like Fujisato is innocent.

To be honest, she was probably still working at the convenience store at the time.

While we were chatting, based on the analysis of her responses, she looked like an ordinary high schooler no matter what.

Once the lunch break comes, I'll deduce more from the situation then report back to Senpai that I've confirmed Fujisato's innocence.

While thinking that... I still did not lower my guard and continued to observe other students.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Rewinding back to last night...

I explained how lacking my experience with romantic love was.

I also revealed that last night was my first time sharing a bath with a young woman.

I also clarified that last night was my first experience of lying on a girl's lap.

After I thoroughly exposed my past, Shiki still wanted to confirm the contents of my bag, so I had no choice but to offer the puddings in my bag to the two girls.

"I originally guessed it'd be something other than food. .."

Shiki looked very disappointed but I still managed to maintain the deception successfully, finally breathing a sigh of relief. Fujisato, thank you so much!

"Okay, the party has reached its climax so let's start discussing all the things related to the murderer."

Shiki's cold voice turned into a weapon that could stab deep into other's hearts at this time.

So my past was simply an opening speech for introducing the main topic, just something for her to liven up the atmosphere.

"In other words, the subject of my experience with women was totally pointless..."

"Jirou-kun, don't worry. I have never had contact with boys before either, whether letting a boy lie on my lap, helping a boy scrub his back, or even dying for each other... Or rather, having our bodies overlapping together, you are the only one whom I have ever done any of this with."

"Your way of putting it is a bit weird... But you're saying that you've never had any contact with boys before?"

As she was not only everyone's senior but also a very cute girl, all the boys wished to get close to Shiinamachi-senpai.

Of course, although feeling bothered by a girl's age was little strange, Senpai was a Nightkin and surely must have lived longer than humans like us. Although the monopolizing desire in my heart refused to accept this fact, Senpai probably had many chances to come into contact with males, right?

"Monjirou appears to be pondering Kaguya's past experiences with men."

"Shiki, can you not expose me so quickly?"

Shiki really was a scary girl, able to see right into my heart using her eyes that was covered by her hair.

"Umm, I... Well..."

Shiinamachi-senpai began to panic. Seeing her cheeks blush scarlet, together with that troubled look on her face ... It looked like she really had few chances to come into contact with men.

But I remembered that she had apparently lost her memory. If that was true, then before losing her memory, she could have had a lover. As soon as that thought occurred to me, I felt a dull pain in my chest.

"Jirou-kun, I don't know whether you're willing to believe me or not, but to this date, I... Umm... have almost never had any skin contact with a boy."

Senpai said firmly to me, instantly making my heart feel much relieved.

But the jealousy already growing in my heart was hard to eradicate.

"Didn't you say you had lost your memory, Senpai? Then how do you know that you've never had male contact in the past?"

"Hmm, well... Were it not my first time to have contact with a boy, umm... I think I wouldn't have felt so nervous , so uneasy, blushing and having my heart pound so hard..."

"S-Senpai was feeling uneasy, blushing and having her heart pound for my sake..."

Senpai nodded subtly at me, her face bright red.

"After various observations, I hereby confirm that Kaguya's prior experience with male contact is zero."

Shiki also added on the side on Senpai's behalf.

"Rather, Kaguya is actually quite afraid of males. Monjirou, you are one of the rare male candidates that she is able to have normal contact with. Even if they lose their memories, living things will reflexively act upon their old habits and respond the same way. So based on results, it is possible to conclude that she has no prior experience with male contact at all."

"I see. Shiki, thank you for your explanation."

"You're welcome."

Shiki gave a nod. I began to feel a sense of reassurance towards her. I see, so because she was always analyzing, thinking and observing on different levels to reach reasonable conclusions, no wonder Senpai found her so dependable.

"I was thinking Senpai might have had contact with members of her race..."

But I still found it difficult to let go completely. Perhaps I really was a shameful man. Men were always particularly concerned with the "shadow of the previous man", this was almost a basic instinct. Naturally, I was no exception.

"Oh, don't worry, because the Lords are all female."

I couldn't help but feel that the Nightkin race was too amazing.

No matter how long their life span, if all of them were female, then how did they leave descendants? I really wanted to know how the Nightkin solved this issue but asking about it would apparently constitute sexual harassment so I decided to behave.

"Currently what is certain is that the vast majority of Lords tends to have children with their Knights."

"!?"

Shiki had proceeded to say something that greatly shocked me.

"...Really...?"

I tried hard to suppress the emotions shaking my heart and forcefully pushed my vanity glasses up twice.

As for Shiinamachi-senpai... The blush on her face had already spread to her ears. Just by looking, it was obvious that her ears were red to their tips.

I-I see. Right. Yes.

So the "safe day" Senpai mentioned really did carry that level of meaning...? No, in that case, it'd be a "risky day" instead, right...?

"Oh, umm, please don't discuss this topic anymore, uh.. .. Let's hurry and cut to the chase!"

Senpai looked down, her hands waving in front of her face. This adorable sight was quite something to behold.

If I had to use an analogy, Senpai's motions were like a small animals, possessing greatly soothing properties, capable of consoling Shiki and I who were watching her from the side. With that, of course I couldn't bring myself to ask Senpai what the true meaning of "safe day" was.

But whatever. In any case, Senpai never had any experience with men and for some reason, I was fortunate enough to be selected by Senpai. That was enough.

"Okay, roger that. Let us start the serious discussion segment."

Shiki took out a notebook from her lab coat, spun the ball point pen in her right hand and announced.

"Serious discussion segment... Although it's a bit of a shame, I understand."

"You two... are both equally annoying..."

Hearing Senpai's sulking words, a sadistic urge surged forth in my heart. But since she is Senpai, whether in school year or how many years lived, I must respect her seniority. Hence, I should only tease her once in a while.

"So, Kaguya, are you able to recognize who the culprit is?"

Next, Shiki suddenly went straight to confirming the culprit and other related matters.

"Umm... No idea at all."

Shiinamachi-senpai's eyebrows dropped.

"While I was waiting for Jirou-kun... I suddenly heard knocking so I called out to answer then opened the door... Then the blade stabbed into my chest, just like that."

Senpai pointed at the wooden door in the room. That spot was some distance away from where she collapsed.

“So basically… Senpai was pushed back a fair distance from the position of the wooden door?”

“Looks like it.”

Judging from the location where the pool of blood was formed, it could also be confirmed that Senpai drew her last breath in the center of the room.

The murderer’s blade had aimed accurately to pierce her heart. At the time, Senpai stumbled and probably had no way of walking over to where she fell.

“Kaguya, are you unable to confirm the culprit’s face and appearance?”

“Hmm… No, I really can’t be certain. By the time I noticed the person’s figure, it had already happened.”

“Senpai, what about the size of the figure? For example, similar to mine? Or more like Shiki’s?”

“Oh, in that case… I think it wasn’t as big as yours, Jirou-kun. Compared to Shiki-san… Maybe a bit taller, or perhaps about the same? I can’t be sure…”

If the attacker was only slightly taller than Shiki or about her height, then that person was probably a short boy or even a girl. However, would a girl be able to stab a blade so accurately through the heart? Hearts were essentially masses of muscle tissue. To stab a blade through a heart required substantial force. Besides, the attacker had pierced the heart completely. It would take even a man quite a bit of strength.

“I see, I see.”

Shiki recorded these details in her notebook while nodding repeatedly. Her actions were quite experienced and it felt like she was long used to making these kinds of records.

“Monjirou, I will confirm with you. How much muscle power is needed to pierce the heart in one strike?”

Then Shiki tossed me that question with absolute precision.

--I am a descendant of trained killers.

She must have asked me this question because she knew of that fact.

This was a highly efficient manner of information gathering.

The useful person here was not the usual, laid back " Sakuradamon Jirou" but the man who was born in a family of killers, the one who had learned all sorts of knowledge and techniques from his mother. Indeed, for the sake of protecting Shiinamachi-senpai--In other words, the "master", that was how a vassal ought to act.

Hence, I one again pushed my glasses swiftly and switched my mental state.

"Ordinary high school boy" Sakuradamon Jirou and " professional killer" me. The act of touching the glasses served as a ritual and hint to switch consciousness. My " normal human soul" was not mature enough while my consciousness and emotions were evidently not stable enough. If I returned to being a "killer" for too long, the mental state in my mind that approaches a normal person's could disappear.

Hence, my little sister established a system of self-control techniques for me, in other words, I would use this pair of *vanity glasses* to switch between modes.

I was currently trying to let my thoughts return to that of a killer's while retaining my consciousness…

Then I began to speak slowly:

"A human's heart is a mass of muscle, so based on common logic, a female's arm strength shouldn't be able to pierce the heart so easily. Besides, a certain amount of force is needed to kill the target in one strike, this too, is very hard to achieve. Hmm… Supposing Senpai was standing in the center of the room at the time and the murderer had charged from the entrance forcefully to stab her, then that might be possible. As long as one knows how to use the impact and bodyweight to enhance the murder weapon's force, it should be possible ."

"Monjirou, according to your observations, does the culprit possess a similar level of killing technique as your lineage?"

--This girl.

Was she trying to test out my abilities just by using these questions?

From the blue right eye that was vaguely visibly between the strands of her hair, light was given off that could not be underestimated.

--I see.

She thinks that I am one of the suspects for killing Shiinamachi-senpai, which is why she asked for my opinion, thereby letting me know that she was wary of me.

"Senpai's wound was very deep. Based on that, the murder weapon should be a large bladed tool or perhaps a kitchen knife of a certain length. If the weapon has a certain amount of weight, even if the user's skill is inferior to mine, the objective can still be achieved. If the murderer is on a similar level as me, then he or she should be able to murder Senpai with ease."

"In other words, as long as the culprit possesses a blade of that level, it's possible to achieve what was done, is that it?"

"Yeah, indeed. In learning techniques in killing, the use of swords and spears are basic essential skills. On that point, the murderer should have a certain level of muscle strength."

"Let me see… Height roughly the same as an average girl but rather strong… Someone fitting these requirements could be the murderer, right?"

Shiinamachi-senpai had her arms crossed before her chest while she looked down at the floor.

That spot must be where she was stabbed.

…How much did it hurt her at the time? At least when I was stabbed, it really hurt a lot.

Senpai was definitely not human but judging from the interactions I've had with her over the past three months, I find her to be no different from an ordinary girl. To think that someone could take a sword and stab her to death with absolute precision and efficiency without any hesitation at all.

This was almost something that only a professional killer could do.

As soon as I thought that, I suddenly felt a chill down my spine.

Shiki's question just not only expressed her suspicions about me but also, at the same time--revealed that she believes the murderer to be on a professional level.

I couldn't help but look at Shiki's face, not knowing what she was thinking.

"Monjirou, I will confirm with you. When you arrived here, was the clock tower locked?"

Shiki's ballpoint pen's tip pointed at me as she questioned me. I could feel those eyes, hidden behind her bangs, flashing with a serious gaze.

"Hmm, I unlocked it before entering, then after entering the clock tower, I locked it up again."

I remember locking up for sure to prevent intruders from following after me.

…Hmm? In other words--

"In other words, it's possible that the culprit… after killing Kaguya, locked the door again… then hid in the monitor's room downstairs from Kaguya's room."

If Shiki's reasoning was correct, that meant that I had passed by the killer's hiding place at the time. Or rather, I was stabbed to death later so things could have happened as Shiki hypothesized?

"Let me think… Regardless of the identity of the one who killed me, this clock tower's door cannot be opened unless you have a key, is that right?"

"Kaguya, you are correct. Since the culprit also killed Monjirou, in other words, the culprit's range of action is limited. However, herein lies a question. *Why did the culprit kill Monjirou as well?*"

"Hmm…"

I tried to ponder what had happened in sequence.

First, the killer unlocked the clock tower's entrance to invade the tower.

Then the killer locked the door and proceeded to kill Senpai.

Then I unlocked the door and came to Senpai's room. At this time, the killer appeared behind me and killed me .

I see. So that's how one can trace the killer's movements like this.

Shiki's method of thinking felt like a detective's. I was quite impressed.

Since early childhood, I had been trained nonstop as a killer so I had no chance to undergo this type of investigative thought.

After joining the library monitors, I also started reading some mystery novels. From the authors' perspectives, I was probably a good reader because I always failed to guess the culprit's identity and would get a surprise at the ending every time.

"Here is a copy of my notes for you two."

Shiki handed to Senpai and me a sheet of paper torn out from her note book.

The lines drawn on the paper were very straight and neat, so much that I couldn't help but suspect whether she used a ruler to draw them. Illustrated on the paper was a floor plan of the clock tower with notes included on the side. The crime scene was this room and she had drawn two people in that room, so they were probably representing me and Shiinamachi-senpai.

To think that she even colored the area around us red, what the heck was Shiki trying to do…

"Since this is a rare chance, let's try to recreate the crime scene."

"Yes, I understand."

After hearing Shiki's suggestion, Senpai and I nodded in agreement then stood up from our seat cushions.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

There were many places circled in red on the piece of notebook paper with annotations of "Important!"

1. Back door: the school entrance that everyone knows. Only place to sneak in to school grounds at night!
2. Entrance: clock tower entrance. The heavy metal door can even deflect bullets!
3. Library monitors' office: the lounge for library monitors. What might be hidden on the back of the giant clock's face plate…?
4. Clock tower management room: the location where Kaguya and Monjirou were killed!
5. Bathroom: indecent event happened here! \ (^o^)

"…"

"Any questions?"

"Hmm, nope."

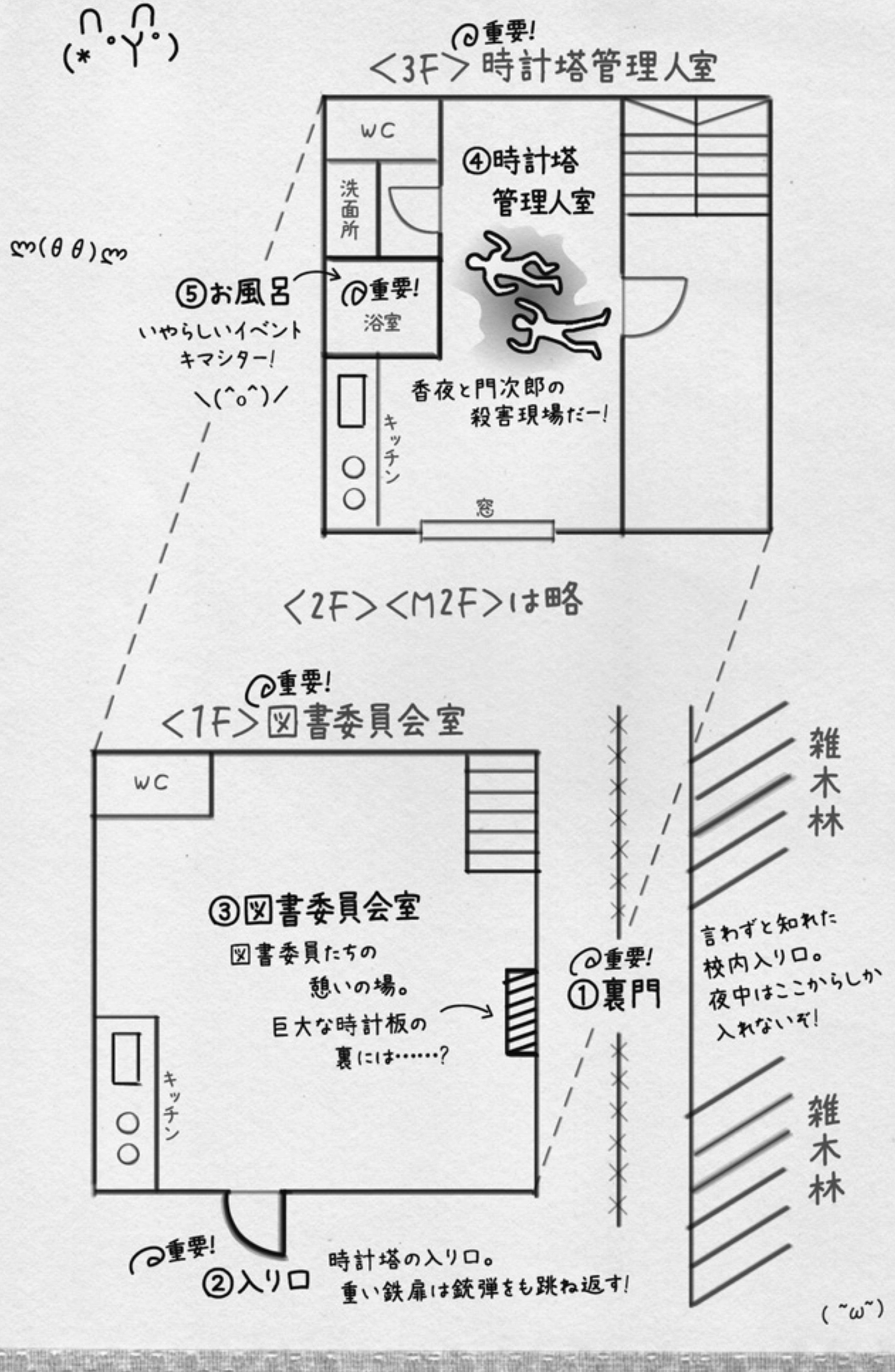
Why were the explanations written with such exuberance? The tone completely failed to match the personality Shiki presented in person, making it impossible for me to hide the confusion in my heart. Especially what the heck's with that ? How excited is she ? There's even an emote at the end.

"Shiki-san's text messages are always very fun! Not only does she put in emotes, there's even ascii art, it's very cute!"

"I see."

Indeed, on the side of the notebook paper there were many emotes and ascii art patterns that one could find on the internet. This totally changed my view of Shiki. So she actually liked cute things a lot?

"Very cute, right?"

∩ ∩
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殺害現場だー!
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③図書委員会室
図書委員たちの
憩いの場。
巨大な時計板の
裏には……?
キッチン
@重要!
①裏門
雑木林
言わずと知れた
校内入り口。
夜中はここからしか
入れないぞ!
雑木林
@重要!
②入り口
時計塔の入り口。
重い鉄扉は銃弾をも跳ね返す!
(˘ω˘)

"Yeah, v-very cute."

Although Shiki was not like Fujisato who would instantly yell "SO CUTE!" whenever she saw anything, it looked like somewhere in the depths of this weirdo's heart was a girl who loved cute things.

Putting that aside, at least thanks to this piece of notebook paper, the situation had become a lot easier to understand.

Looking a Shiki's handwritten note, we left the room, walked down the creaking wooden staircase and arrived at the library monitors' office.

"Senpai, is your condition okay? Having bled so much earlier, will you get uncomfortable symptoms like anemia?"

"Should be fine… Jirou-kun, you really so kind."

Senpai smiled faintly and immediately became embarrassed.

This smile was the smile that soothed my heart and soul every time when library monitor meetings were held. Every time I thought about how a girl with this kind of smile had lost her life, I couldn't help but feel a severe chill. Had she not been a Nightkin, I probably would not be able to see this facial expression again. And after I was killed, had it not been for Senpai's help in giving me immortality, then the result would have been the same. To think that I actually met two miracles in a single night.

Speaking of which, had Shiki come to borrow Senpai's bathroom with her usual state of mind, had she set off earlier, most likely she would have faced danger as well.

"By the way, Shiki, why do you come to Senpai's room to borrow the bathroom?"

Thanks to Shiinamachi-senpai's smile, my heart was finally calm and I asked Shiki a question.

"Shiki-san has locked herself away in the computer lab management room lately doing research so I invited her to use the bathroom at my room every night."

So it was Shiinamachi-senpai who took initiative to invite her? In other words, Shiki was going to visit Senpai's room as usual tonight, which meant that Senpai never intended to be alone with me in the first place.

…Yes, I get it now!

The clock tower management room was Shiinamachi-senpai's personal room. The room itself was like a suite and quite spacious. On the other hand, Shiki was occupying the computer lab management room, so maybe that place might also have been modified to add functions for living?

I found it a bit difficult to imagine staying out overnight, even to the point of staying in school. Although I had the ability to survive outdoors and pitch tents, staying overnight at Shiinamachi-senpai's room together with everyone really was my one and only previous experience staying in school. Perhaps there might be even more people who lived in school discreetly.

Having lived in this area for the past three months, I originally thought this school to be ordinary but now I'm getting an increasingly strong feeling that this place is actually pretty weird.

"Shiki, what do you do in that room?"

"Hacking into the computers of bad guys, obtaining all sorts of state secrets, investigating whether other Nightkin or their vassals exist in other places."

Somehow, I felt like I had unintentionally heard about extremely outrageous work.

So stuff like that really existed in the word. I couldn't help but think that, yet…

Every generation of my family consisted of professional killers, hence I changed my mind. There was no need to make a big deal out of what Shiki did. After all, I was someone ignorant of worldly matters, which is why I used to think the world was unexpectedly ordinary. I also used to take my own upbringing for granted and never had any doubts.

However, there did exist many things in the world that are known to few, it's just that we don't know about them. I feel like this was the sort of information I seem to have obtained many times tonight.

"Senpai, apart from Shiki, is there anyone else in this school you know who has a special background?"

"Yes… But since they are keeping a low profile on purpose, I have no choice but to keep their secrets for now."

Shiinamachi-senpai lifted her index finger and made a hush sound. Indeed, if people wanted to hide their background, then it wouldn't be appropriate to spill their secrets without their consent.

Based on this fact, then surely there were other people living in the school.

And those people must have pretty astounding backgrounds.

I've already accepted all sorts of surreal circumstances, even to the point of naturally coming to conclusions as the above.

"By the way, Monjirou."

"Hmm?"

Walking down the stairs, we reached the library monitors' office.

Shiki waved repeatedly at me then pointed at the far wall.

"Monjirou, if someone hid behind the back of that large clock's faceplate, could you tell?"

"Hmm… If it's the daytime or there's lighting nearby, I might be able to tell. But if it's totally dark like just now, I probably can't."

The surroundings were very dim at the time and I didn't expect anyone to be hiding in the first place, so if someone suppressed their breathing and leaned behind the back of the clock faceplate against the wall, I wouldn't have noticed at all.

"But if the other person didn't know I was coming, he or she wouldn't have hid there, right?"

"That's right. Hence, the culprit actually…"

Shiki moved over to the clock's faceplate.

"Suppose the murderer was just about to flee the scene and Monjirou just happened to enter through the door here…"

Saying that, Shiki hid behind the clock faceplate… Getting on all fours, hiding her body.

"In this kind of condition, can the culprit lurk like this, hidden in the darkness while watching Monjirou climb up the stairs?"

"--Why doesn't the culprit take the opportunity to escape instead of going out of their way to kill me off?"

"Well then, Monjirou, let's call upon your speculations of the killer's psychology to provide a hypothesis."

Shiki took out a ballpoint pen from her chest pocket and handed it over to me.

"Imagine this pen as either a key or a knife as appropriate depending on the situation when making use of this prop. Monjirou, please act it out. What would you do if you were the culprit?"

"Hmm, let me think about it first."

"Go ahead."

Senpai was looking at me intently, so I hoped to make my performance as realistic as possible. So I kept staring at the note paper, imagining what course of action the culprit should take.

--Okay, first of all…

The culprit walks from over to the clock tower then opens the lock at . Just as Shiki's notes indicate, this is the only entrance to the school at night. Without a key, this door cannot be opened.

Then passing by , in other words, our current room, then heading over to , Shiinamachi-senpai's room--

As for , the bathroom is totally irrelevant to the entire incident, simply a sweet memory between Senpai and me .

"Senpai, did you hear any knocking at your door?"

"Yes. I thought it was Jirou-kun at the time, so I opened it immediately."

Although the incident wasn't caused by me, I still felt very apologetic because there's a feeling like I indirectly killed Senpai. However, I don't have the time to feel depressed over this. These kinds of thoughts are better left for reminiscing in bed alone so as to toss and turn, unable to fall asleep.

Back to the main topic, I faced Senpai squarely and tried to act out the scene when the murderer killed Senpai. I pushed the tip of the ballpoint pen towards Shiinamachi-senpai.

"Monjirou, could you do the deed with a 'gabah!" Please."

"Not 'gabah' right? I think it should more of a 'gusah'."

"The sound effect is just a kind of performance."

"--In any case, it's just for show."

I made eye contact with Senpai and she performed the motion of slowly opening the door.

Then I… with a slow and steady pace, I aimed for Senpai's chest.

--Aimed at the chest.

"Oh, Jirou-kun, the position should be slightly lower."

I really couldn't bring myself to poke the ballpoint pen directly into Senpai's magnificent bust. Hence, Senpai pulled my hand and poked the pen's tip into her soft bosom. The pen was capped so I don't think it would hurt too much but through the pen, I could feel concretely the suppleness and elasticity of Senpai's body.

In this manner, my hand was almost about to touch Senpai's voluptuous bosom… I frantically released the ballpoint pen.

"?"

"I-I see. So that's how Senpai was stabbed to death!"

Senpai looked at my panic in puzzlement. To prevent the girls from asking why I was so embarrassed and nervous, I hastily tried to continue modeling the original killer's movements.

"Oh right. The culprit then crashed into me just like that, pushing my entire body to the center of the room."

After listening to Senpai's explanation, Shiki took out another ballpoint pen, knocking audibly on the chin. Senpai and I looked at Shiki while she pondered, waiting for her to comment.

"I see. I understand now. In that case, the culprit actually… Hold on, let's switch up."

Shiki exchanged positions with me.

"The culprit actually used this long and thick thing to penetrate Kaguya. Using his or her entire body's strength , the killer pushed Kaguya to the center of the room."

Shiki held the ballpoint pen with both hands then pretended to slam her body into Shiinamachi-senpai. But perhaps because Shiki didn't actually thrust with a running start, Senpai's bountiful bosom cushioned her motion. If there weren't a reenactment of a murder process, the whole scene would look like a drawing, bringing a smile to one's face.

This fact, combined with what Shiki just said about a long and thick thing… I'll just pretend not to notice.

"Yes yes yes, like this. The murderer charged at me like that, giving me quite a fright."

Shiinamachi-senpai received Shiki's motion with her chest and slowly moved backwards.

"Then I collapsed in the room's center."

"Yes. When I discovered Senpai, she was already collapsed in the center of ."

When I saw Senpai, she had already fallen in a pool of blood. But reviving after receiving my blood, Senpai decided in her panic to pass along the gift of immortality to me. Furthermore, she cleaned up the blood from the scene before I awakened. Although I don't understand what kind of power it was exactly, nor how it worked… In any case, the two of us apparently don't need to worry about dying from blood loss.

"According to estimates, Kaguya's time of death is roughly when?"

"Should be after 11pm… Yes."

"Let me add that it was 11:55 when I arrived at Senpai's room."

"In that case, a substantial duration must have passed before Kaguya resurrected."

"Yes… Probably. Actually, it was because Jirou-kun's blood happened to splash on me that I was able to revive, so…"

So-called immortality probably required fulfilling certain conditions for resurrection to happen. Looks like this power was even less convenient than I imagined.

"I see. Judging from the situation, even if the culprit was slow, Monjirou probably couldn't have witnessed the crime in the act. In that case--Monjirou, could you please continue playing the culprit."

"Eh? Oh sure."

"So, Monjirou was just about to extend his evil claws towards the lovely and vulnerable Kaguya…"

"No no no, I didn't do it!"

"Fufu."

I protested against the maliciously teasing Shiki while Shiinamachi-senpai watched this scene rather happily.

Hmm. Being able to see Senpai make such a smile, I guess it's worth it for getting teased. Shiki, your criminal actions are totally premeditated!

"Then let's change the wording a bit. Monjirou used his long and thick thing to take away Kaguya's first time … Does that work?"

"I'm sorry, Shiki-sama, I'm begging you. Could you stop using this type of description to recreate the events, okay?"

"Very well."

"?"

Shiinamachi-senpai simply cocked her head in puzzlement with a face full of innocence, probably because she was not too familiar with these dirty keywords with ambiguous meanings. Without a direct description, Senpai was not going to get the meaning. Judging from that, even though she was my senior in school, she was actually a pure and untainted maiden inside.

"As a side note, to me personally, Monjirou's naked body was the first ever male nude body I've ever seen."

I was forced to recall recent memories that I had not wish to remember.

"A man's naked body isn't interesting at all, right?"

"At the time, I was originally planning to confirm the mark that had appeared on your body."

"Oh, you mean the pattern on my chest?"

The pattern had appeared after Shiinamachi-senpai had helped me to resurrect. This pattern was also proof that I had obtained Senpai's magical power and become her companion.

"By the way, I also noticed the scar on your right shoulder."

"That's…"

Hearing Shiki point out my right shoulder's scar, I used my left hand to touch the side of the my right shoulder.

"You said that it was an old wound, right?"

So Shiki was listening to my conversation with Senpai? As soon as I thought that, I couldn't help but look at Shiki . However, her bangs covered both eyes and I was unable to read any emotions from her.

"This is where the promise between my mother and me was carved."

I rubbed my left hand back and forth over the scar then noticed Senpai tilting her head slightly.

"You said that's the promise between your mother and you?"

"Yes. No matter what happens, as long as my body carries this scar, I won't forget my mother's words. In other words, this is the bond between me and my disappeared mother."

Although my mother had left behind a great sun of money, before she left, the hidden significance behind this scar was what she cared about the most.

--Dormant beneath this scar is actually my entire clan's secret.

Precisely because of that, my mother warned me repeatedly that I must firmly remember this scar and the significance behind it.

Just recalling the contents of her warning made me feel a chill down my spine.

"Understood. In other words, there are still a number of places on Monjirou's body that I have yet to investigate thoroughly."

"Yeah. Something like that."

Looks like Shiki still had not figured out what this scar represented.

"Even if I keep staring at the scar, I cannot understand its meaning."

"So you've been staring at it all along?"

I recalled how Shiki had been silently staring at me while I was putting on my clothes.

"Just to be safe, I shall use a maidenly excuse for myself. In actual fact, I felt quite embarrassed at the time. "

Although I felt that Shiki was doing it openly with an upfront attitude at the time, since she went as far as to say this, I'll just pretend it was so. I decided to believe in her explanation… Just as I felt an impulse to turn my gaze towards Shiki, I noticed a small and compact realm.

Despite Shiki's arrogant airs, that part of hers was rather modest.

"I can sense dirty ogling."

"Sorry about that."

"No problem. Once you get tired of Kaguya's breasts, I allow you to freely admire mine."

"Oh okay, thank you."

Although I didn't think I'd ever grow tired of Senpai's magnificent bust, this suggestion was still very attractive, hence I nodded in response for now.

"Shiki-san, Jirou-kun, t-this is unacceptable!"

I could hear Senpai's utterly embarrassed voice. It made my lips curl in a smile.

"Putting this aside, let's continue the reenactment. First , suppose the culprit escaped the room after murdering Kaguya at . Currently, let's assume that Monjirou's murderer is the same person and continue with that."

Shiki rapidly wrote in her notebook. Her fingers moved quickly over the notebook, it looked like she was drawing. Shiinamachi-senpai looked at Shiki's motions then stared at the note in her hand.

"Hmm… If both murders were committed by the same person… After killing me, there was still a period of time until Jirou-kun was murdered. What was the culprit doing during this time?"

"That's right. Perhaps there might be something subtle here that only the culprit could discern. Monjirou, if you were the culprit, what would you have done?"

"Hmm…"

A murderer's actions. I've never actually carried such a action out. Neither had I ever thought about it. To think I'd have to test this under hypothetical conditions right now. However, that murderer's skills were definitely very professional. Although it was quite difficult, I suppose having me to deduce the entire process might really be the fastest solution.

In that case, it couldn't be helped. In order to turn my consciousness entirely to my other self, I took off my vanity glasses to switch modes.

Next, I took a deep breath and exhaled, allowing myself to regain the ice-cold judgment of a killer's.

First of all, there was no need to clean up the scene after the murder. Once the target was successfully killed, the most effective course of action was to leave straight away. Whether destroying evidence or taking other actions, the more unnecessary behavior, the easier it was to leave clues behind.

Hence, supposing "I" was the culprit, after killing the target--Shiinamachi-senpai--I absolutely wouldn't do anything else. Murder cases in mystery novels often have many clues, which is how the detective catches the culprit at the end. In real life, the more trivial and mundane things, naturally, the higher the chances of failure. After all, I was someone who had undergone the education of a professional killer's, so my conclusion is: most murderers are not professionals, hence there is nothing surprising even if they fail.

Because there was no need to personally see the aftermath of the murder, I would have swiftly departed through the wooden door and ran down the steps. As long as no one heard the wooden steps creaking, everything would be fine. Then reaching the library monitors' office on the ground floor, I'd immediately leave the building. Escaping directly was fine.

If the time of murder was 11pm, then not even a minute would be needed from killing the target to leaving the building.

From outside the building to leaving the school grounds, it shouldn't take five minutes either.

With that, it was possible to kill the target without anyone discovering--That being said, after killing her, it was necessary to kill "Sakuradamon Jirou".

If that was the case…

"There should have been quite a gap between the culprit escaping and my arrival time. If the murderer chose to kill me, it must have been because he or her discovered me during the escape then tailed me and returned to the crime scene in an abnormal move."

It should have been roughly 11:35pm when I met Kuhou in front of the school. The culprit probably discovered me heading to the school building at this time.

In that case, it meant that during a gap as long as thirty minutes, the culprit was staying near the crime scene. This behavior was really quite weird… But I did in fact get stabbed by the killer so let's assume this is the truth for now.

"Monjirou, do you think that the culprit could have secretly tailed you before killing you?"

"If the culprit has no experience or only received a bit of training, I'd immediately notice someone was following me. But if it was an expert, that'd be tough to notice."

"Okay, then let's assume it was an expert. According to my speculations, back then, your mental state was 'Wow! I will be enjoying my lovey-dovey time with Shiinamachi-senpai soon, hehehe!' hence you must have been quite distracted."

"Shiki, hold on!"

"What? Do you wish for me to deliberately add in more emotional fluctuation as a performance?"

"I'm not talking about your acting skills. But what's with that hehehe?"

"I am simply speculating that such thoughts probably went through Monjirou's mind at the time."

…It's true, the way I see it, I do feel that these kinds of thoughts could very well have happened.

But as soon as I heard someone else voice them, for some reason, I felt a very sad feeling in my heart…

"No, hmm, even if you deduced my thoughts at the time, could you not voice them out please…"

"Understood. First of all, Monjirou allowed himself to wallow in his lust, then stepped towards the clock tower's door… This is probably okay, right?"

"If possible, I really hope you won't describe things that way, but yes, I did walk to the clock tower's door. After opening the door, I immediately locked it again."

I pointed at the door at the entrance. Shiki walked over to it.

She locked the door, producing a heavy clang in the lock.

Hearing this sound reminded me of something.

"Right, after entering here I immediately shut the door, so even if the murderer was following me, there shouldn't be any way to enter this building again."

That's right, just as Shiki wrote, "Entrance: clock tower entrance. The heavy metal door can even deflect bullets!" This door was extremely thick and heavy. Also, there was no other entrance so we could rule out the hypothesis of the culprit discovering me then following after me.

--Just as I realized this fact…

I suddenly recalled how Shiki said the culprit could have hid behind the large clock's faceplate.

"I see… If the culprit wanted to kill, even if he or she followed me, there was no way to achieve this objective."

"Apparently so. So we can hypothesize that for the culprit to kill you, he or she probably did not step out of this door."

The killer had not stepped outside. If the killer's plan was to first kill Shiinamachi-senpai then kill me, then it was understandable why he or she chose to remain inside the building. Because my arrival time was unknown, the culprit had no choice but to hide here to wait for me to appear.

"Then we can hypothesize that after killing Shiinamachi-senpai… the culprit hid behind the clock's faceplate, right?"

"Yes. Please continue along these lines."

I really couldn't understand. Since the culprit's methods were as precise as a professional killer's, why take the risk of getting discovered and hide behind the clock's faceplate? Of course, I could understand if the killer had decided from the beginning to kill me after killing Senpai… But wait, I still had a question: Why did the murderer know I had an appointment with Senpai?

"The culprit was hiding here, waiting for 'me' to appear."

"In that case, arriving later, you immediately went up the stairs, right?"

Shiki walked over to the stairs then walked up, stepping on the wooden steps, producing creaking sounds as a result.

"Hmm. The culprit personally watched 'me' climb up the stairs towards Shiinamachi-senpai's room. Then rushing out from behind this clock face--"

I took my steps slowly and came to the staircase.

Just as the wooden steps made a sound--

"Shiki, stop for a sec."

I looked up at Shiki, but immediately looked down in a panic.

Because I almost caught sight of the view under Shiki's skirt, the depths of those slender thighs…

"Monjirou, you prefer to look at my panties openly?"

"No! I wasn't looking!"

"I have already seen your naked body, hence I permit you to peek at my panties."

What the heck kind of suggestion was that? But since she already said okay, that means I really can look?

Those thoughts surfaced in my mind but I immediately realized it was a trap set by Shiki so I shook my head.

"Ahem. Shiki, I think that the proposed crime process is too infeasible."

"Really?"

I somehow felt like Shiki was staring at me but because I couldn't look up, I turned my face to the side and brought up what I discovered.

"Supposing that the culprit had no choice but to kill ' me' and that he or she really was hiding here, then as soon as 'I' stepped on the stairs, the culprit could have finished 'me' off from behind."

The culprit was carrying such a large blade with substantial destructive potential. According to normal logic, doing the deed downstairs would have been the safer approach.

"The culprit only buried the murder weapon deeply into your back after you had discovered Kaguya and shocked as a result. In that case, you were less likely to counterattack, so the overall situation was safer… Suppose the killer knew this, what do you think?"

If that really was the case, then it meant that the killer already knew before hand that I was the descendant of professional killers. Without taking into account the possibility I might take notice and resist, it would have been difficult to achieve the objective.

However, if the culprit was backed by someone like Shiki who was privy to all sorts of information, then that probability would not be zero.

"Let's just assume that the culprit was able to chase after me on the stairs without making a sound then silently approach me from behind to stab me to death, that's really too--"

Indeed. As soon as anyone walked on these stairs, the wooden steps would surely creak.

No matter how hard an ordinary person tried, their own weight would cause the wooden boards on the steps to produce sounds from friction. Walking silently up and down those steps should be impossible.

But at the time, I totally did not hear any sound from someone ascending the stairs. Whether unlocking, opening the door or climbing the stairs, I didn't hear anything at all.

When I discovered Shiinamachi-senpai, the surroundings were unnaturally silent, almost to the point of hurting my ears. This was the indisputable truth.

--Precisely because of that, I was definitely capable of hearing the culprit's footsteps approaching me from behind.

Hence, the conclusion was--

"Impossible."

"I see. Understood."

Holding onto the handrail, Shiki tried to make creaking noises with the wooden boards underfoot.

Just by shaking the handrail, the sound of friction would increase.

"So, if that's the case… Shiki-san--"

Originally silent, listening to Shiki and I hypothesizing , Shiinamachi-senpai suddenly spoke with worry in her voice.

Shiki looked at the unsettled Senpai and slowly nodded--

"Yes. By my reasoning, the culprit must have used a Gift in order to accomplish the entire crime."

Thus she announced these ominous words.

Chapter 2 B-Part - Murder and Gift

■Search Results for "gift":

- An outstanding talent. A unique and distinctive power. Excellent talent.
- 0 search results.
- Someone possessing a special ability that is beyond human.

"Seriously, Kuhou, do you have some kind of gift… a special ability perhaps?"

Next, let's fast forward back to the next day after the incident.

After finishing summer supplementary lesson in the morning with Fujisato, it was the lunch break so we went to the student cafeteria to have lunch. The cafeteria was more deserted than usual today and Kuhou was already waiting there for us.

I said hi and after a brief chat--

I instantly asked upfront.

"Oh I see, then let's discuss it for a bit."

After answering that, Kuhou made a "hmm…" sound and entered deep thought.

Sitting next to her, Fujisato was smiling cheerfully. She most likely thought that this was a continuation of the eighth grade syndrome conversation. If that were actually the case, I would feel much better.

"Yeah. Also, did you use that ability last night to kill other people effortlessly without hindrance?"

"Indeed, last night… I don't have an alibi."

Kuhou admitted very readily… No wait, she was simply following the discussion I had opened up.

"But Monjirou-senpai, what evidence is there to prove that I did it?"

Originally eating her chicken and egg rice bowl with great enjoyment, she pursed her lips to make a fearless smile with chopsticks raised.

That smile suited her face far too well. Everything matched the proper airs of my underclassman's warrior style.

"Wow, Nagi, you really look so authentic!"

"Kendo is a type of martial arts that places great emphasis on form. Putting on airs like a swordsman is necessary to intimidate the opponent, thereby obtaining powerful strength. It is necessary to challenge the opponent while maintaining thoughts of 'I am a swordsman with outstanding ability, I will kill the enemy'."

"Ehehe, I see! I've always thought that kendo required keeping your mind free of random thoughts then attacking with a mighty shout."

"Of course, that's one method, but… Oh well, no matter what, victory is decided by instantaneous exchanges. Hence… I was thinking, if I actually possessed one of those gifts or superpowers mentioned by Senpai, it'd be so much easier."

"Kuhou, this is totally unexpected. So this kind of underhanded idea has crossed your mind too?"

"Senpai, I don't think there's anything underhanded about gifts and abilities. If you possess that kind of power since birth, or you acquired it through hard work and training, then it counts as part of the possessor's special characteristics. How should I put this? It's like having sharp eyesight, keen hearing, good looks or a strong body… etc. The possessor is supposed to produce an excellent performance in areas where these abilities can be used in the first place."

I see. That point of view is quite honest and upfront.

I've always disliked applying the killing skills I've trained since early childhood to martial arts or sports, which was why I studied my ass off, finally becoming a library monitor. But in Kuhou's view, the right way would be to make good use of abilities that had been cultivated in the process of growing up.

"So, Senpai, what kind of gift do you think I possess? If possible, I wish to be like Fujisato-senpai, to have a cute face and charm like an idol. If that could come true, I'd surely feel very happy."

"Eh? I-I don't have that kind of ability, okay!?"

Fujisato frantically waved her hands. That motion was definitely too cute. I see. For her to be able to perform this action naturally without calculation beforehand, this would count as a talent akin to a gift, right?

"Let me see… How about hovering in midair, for example?"

Possessing such an ability would allow the culprit to go up and down the stairs silently.

"Using an ability to hover in midair to kill people… If it was a murder in a locked room mystery, then this ability can be used with footprints to provide misdirection… or something like that?"

"If you can fly, then isn't it better to just take the victim to a high altitude then drop them? The deceased would have fallen to their death from the air where there was nothing! …This kind of situation would pose even more of a headache for detectives, right?"

"Wow, your idea is so vicious, Fujisato-senpai, who could have guessed from the way you look?"

"I-It's very vicious?"

Putting aside the content of their conversation, watching these two girls smiling at each other, I felt that this was truly a relaxing lunch break… However, I still decided to keep these two of my friends on the suspect list for now.

Last night, Shiki had said to me:

'Monjirou, could you try and think, is there anyone you know who were still out and about last night?'

At the time, the ones who surfaced in my mind were Fujisato working at the convenience store and Kuhou who had just left school.

Hence, I immediately listed both of them as suspects, however--

"Suppose I didn't have the ability to hover in midair but some other gift, what kind of gift would I have?"

Kuhou seemed quite engaged in the subject I brought up, how unexpected.

Like me, she was also one of the library monitors and also knew about Shiinamachi-senpai's room upstairs, and even had a key as well. In that sense, she was the most likely suspect, however… To think that she would get so into this topic of conversation, I really can't understand if she really knows what I'm talking about or if she's actually just an airhead?

"I think Nagi seems to have a way to do all kinds of things!"

Indeed, the warrior's aura exuded from her made me feel that it wouldn't be surprising if she had learned killing techniques. She gave off that impression even more than me.

"Hmm… For example, Kuhou could have been trained to prevent herself from making any sound when walking … Something like that?"

For a professional killer and master of martial arts, eliminating the sound of one's footsteps was a very important skill. If you ask me which question was the real one, I'd have to say this was the true answer that I wanted to find out. Since she is a highly accomplished expert in kendo, I naturally suspected if she was able to climb those stairs without making a sound.

"Does that count as a gift? Well true, if a gift can refer to a special skill acquired through training, describing it that way might be right. Kendo practitioners like me must use our legs, so there's always some sound from friction."

"Eliminating the sound of footsteps… This skill sounds so plain."

Both girls' opinions were very reasonable. As for hearing Fujisato rate this skill as "so plain", it really made me, someone who had learned this skill through dedicated hard work, feel a little lamenting.

"However, Senpai's choice of words makes me feel like you're indirectly trying to identify the culprit in a murder case."

Kuhou narrowed her slender and clear eyes, the corner of her lips curling up.

I felt like I was being seen right through.

"Actually, that's totally correct. Last night, Shiinamachi-senpai was murdered."

"Eh? I just met her in the library?"

Yes. Because even though she was killed, she still managed to survive.

"I met Senpai this morning too. Senpai was still laid back as always."

So Kuhou saw Senpai too? Then if the culprit was one of these two girls, then she would already know that last night's murder ended in failure.

But the culprit would already know they had failed to kill me as soon as they met me. Suppose the culprit deliberately concealed the shock in their heart and talked to me as though nothing had happened, then all I can say was that these two girls' acting skills are too good.

Perhaps this was a perfect example of what my sister said about 'every woman is an actress and talented at telling lies.'

"I get it. Senpai was chatting with Shiinamachi-senpai last night about this… like studying detective novels? Or something like mental puzzles? It's true, that clock tower does seem like a suitable place to use for this kind of subject."

What an excellent underclassman, smart and quick on the uptake, she immediately interpreted the meaning behind my words from different angles.

"Exactly. Something similar to a game, we're going to figure out who Senpai's murderer is."

I knew that this method was very dangerous but in reality, something even more dangerous had already happened so I had no choice but to do this.

"Eh, yesterday… Monjirou, you went to Shiinamachi-senpai's room last night?"

Fujisato's cheeks went red. The direction of her deductions seems to be a bit different.

No, actually, this was how a normal high schooler was supposed to react.

"Shiinamachi-senpai would regularly hold stayover parties. Monjirou-senpai and I have taken part together in the past, but Senpai was the only boy there that time. He was all alone in a corner and looked very lonely."

"It's very embarrassing for a boy to be holding a pajamas party with a group of girls!"

I commented on that gathering last time, causing Fujisato to giggle and smile.

"That's natural, Monjirou. It's to be expected since you're such a serious person after all. In that kind of situation, you can act a bit shameless towards the girls and hassle them, you know?"

"Yeah… But I didn't have the chance back then."

Thinking back, the girls were all chatting so excitedly together, I totally had no way of inserting myself into their conversation topics and was at a total loss what to do. Later on, Kuhou finally couldn't stand to watch and came over to chat with me about martial arts for a while.

I was lucky to have Kuhou taking care of me back then . And now, to think I was suspecting her, that might be kind of rude.

"Apart from Shiinamachi-senpai, who else was there last night?"

After all, Senpai and I were a mixed-gender pair at the height of puberty. Normal people wouldn't think that we'd be alone together.

"There was an underclassman, a first year called Yatono Shiki…"

"Eh? Yatono-san went as well?"

Fujisato reacted to the name.

"What's the matter? Is she your friend?"

"No, but I've always felt that Yatono-san… probably doesn't have many friends. She feels like a solitary scientist. But she does have many fans!"

Solitary. Fans.

Shiki, I never knew that you could be the source of such rumors and even had fans!

Her type of detachment from the mundane world and mysterious airs definitely would attract certain types of fans.

"Then the three of you started playing a detective game? I see."

This really sounded like something Kuhou would say. If she really were the culprit then her ability to play dumb was truly extraordinary.

Precisely because she always looked like a girl whose actions and internal thoughts were consistent and upfront, I would find it very difficult to believe if she said she was actually a terrifying killer or was fine with killing Shiinamachi-senpai and me.

In terms of skills and ability, she should be able to do it . However, she was pretty good friends with me and Shiinamachi-senpai. To be more precise, I really didn't want to believe that she would do something like that.

"What did you chat about? Are you trying to verify how Shiinamachi-senpai was killed?"

"Yeah… Pretty much. Next, everything I say will be just hypothetical, okay? So…"

I recounted the facts from last night in a manner like telling a fictional story.

I took a deep breath briefly then pushed my vanity glasses.

"Let me think…"

Omitting the bathroom event, I then told Kuhou and Fujisato everything I had seen and heard last night in a storytelling manner with as much detail as possible.

I explained the circumstances encountered as well as Shiinamachi-senpai's death then brought up my own death.

Then I told them how Senpai, Shiki and I tried to deduce the culprit's thinking and actions.

Of course, I didn't mention that Shiinamachi-senpai was a Nightkin nor the fact that Shiki belonged to a certain organization. Last time when I said I was a killer, Fujisato had already expressed her view in a smiling, dismissing manner.

"So, do you two want to join in on this deductive game ?"

"It really does seem impossible without possessing some special ability. So that's why you brought up flying and eliminating the sound of footsteps just now, Senpai?"

"Oh~ So while I was working, you guys were discussing something so interesting! I really want to join in too!"

Actually, if Fujisato saw that scene, I'm guessing she'll most likely faint.

After all, when Shiki arrived at the scene, the room was actually still in the state of a crime scene.

"So with that, the most suspicious… Oh I see. Senpai met me in front of the school last night, so naturally, I'm the most likely suspect. I finally understand what you're trying to say, Senpai."

"Eh, Nagi and Monjirou… You met each other last night…?"

Fujisato's cheeks turned red again. It looked like her mind was always filled with thoughts about romance.

"On my way to the school, I happened to run into Kuhou was about to go home."

"Regrettably, Monjirou-senpai and I don't have any special relationship."

So Kuhou felt that regretful about that? I couldn't help but feel a bit happy.

Although our friendship wasn't particularly deep, I've always felt happy interacting with her. After all, during that lonely pajamas party, she took initiative to chat and accompany me.

"Okay, then let's organize the facts of the whole event. Very clearly, I am the most suspicious person. Not only do I possess a key to the library monitors' office, but I am also well-versed in martial arts and possess a bladed instrument of a certain weight. I am also quite short which matches the 'figure' Shiinamachi-senpai witnessed. The timeframe of meeting Monjirou-senpai by chance also overlaps with the timing of the events."

Kuhou openly admitted that she was the prime suspect.

"As for Fujisato-senpai, there's totally no grounds for suspicion. When the crime happened, Fujisato-senpai was working at the convenience store and this can be checked just by asking the store manager. If Fujisato-senpai did it, then it's only possible through deceptions like having an identical twin."

"Twins huh… That might be kind of fun it were true! After all, I'm an only child…"

Even if Fujisato really had a twin, it was very unlikely for her to be the killer. Besides, there's still the footsteps issue.

"But if I'm the real culprit as the prime suspect, in that case… That'd be way too lame."

"Right. In detective novels, if the prime suspect turns out to be the culprit, it'll feel too boring."

Just based on considerations of fun, then the two of them were right. Fujisato and I both agreed with Kuhou.

Not only that. Even if Kuhou followed me closely after seeing me, then the sounds of the key opening the lock and the wooden staircase still presented problems.

Of course, these details only presented difficulties under the prior assumption that *the culprit committed the crime using ordinary means*. If the culprit had used a special power, then all bets were off for physical phenomena. The gifts received by the vassals of Nightkin were apparently divided into many different types, which was why it was possible to have rather special powers like immortality.

"If the story revolves around Monjirou-senpai, then what other characters appear?"

"Oh, hmm, pretty much that's it."

This was a game established under the assumption of " hypothetically" hence Kuhou seemed to be treating it purely as a thinking game, immersing herself into this discussion topic.

On the other hand, Fujisato was a good listener no matter what the topic so she too had happily accepted the story.

If I hadn't gotten stabbed to death for real, perhaps I'd enjoy the conversation even more than them.

"Monjirou-senpai, according to commonly seen methods of misdirection, the most suspicious person should be the character who died in the beginning. In other words, Shiinamachi-senpai, right?"

"Oh, I've heard of that one too! Someone who is thought to have died first often turns out to be the culprit , right? This setup is pretty famous!"

Like Fujisato, I knew that this type of setup often appeared in detective novels.

Because the first victim's identity was unknown, who they were could only be guessed from their clothing but everything turns out to be different from what everyone thought. If that's the case, the initially discovered dead person must disguise themselves as another character then proceed to act separately from the other characters.

But this incident was different. When I rushed onto the scene, Shiinamachi-senpai was the deceased and in the end, she also survived. Just as she said, "if today weren't a safe day, it would've been dangerous."

In other words, although Senpai did not die, in fact she really did encounter an incident sufficient to cause death.

"I think that Monjirou-senpai's should be suspected more."

"Hmm? Me?"

"Oh I get it! You're referring to stories where the protagonist is the culprit, right!?"

"Yes. If the mystery is narrated from first person, then the reader needs to pay extra attention. As the protagonist, 'he' can arbitrarily fabricate what he saw, heard and felt. Deceptions like 'this is what really happened at the time' or something like that."

Indeed, in the story, I'm very suspicious too and could be the killer.

I was both able to open the door to the building's entrance and had accepted Shiinamachi-senpai's invitation.

Then I took out a sword to stab her in the chest.

All actions after that were faked.

But based on pre-established reality, this was totally impossible. After I was stabbed to death, Shiinamachi-senpai had apparently… turned me immortal and resurrected me. If I really were the culprit, it would be impossible explain what actually happened during that blank period in my consciousness.

"After you, the most suspicious person should be that ' Shiki-san'."

Kuhou had probably prepared this answer from the start? Hence she was ranking each character in terms of suspiciousness.

"She is the only character in the story who has knowledge on everyone's movements. For example, when killing Shiinamachi-senpai, she should have a key to open the door if she normally frequents Senpai's room. Also, if she already knew that Monjirou-senpai was going to visit Shiinamachi-senpai's room, she could easily hide somewhere in the room, like in the washroom for example. After seeing Senpai in a panic from discovering Shiinamachi-senpai's corpse, all she had to do was kill Senpai from behind. Then she could leisurely stroll down the stairs and return to the computer lab, then visit Shiinamachi-senpai's room again, thus legitimately becoming the person who discovers the dead victims."

After listening to Kuhou's idea, it really seemed like Shiki was the most suspicious person in the incident.

Indeed. The culprit had no need to hide behind the clock's faceplate to wait for my appearance at all.

If Shiki knew I was coming and had decided beforehand that I must be killed, all she needed to do was wait inside the room. Even with a ton of blood splashed over her from the victims, she didn't need to care at all. After all, she always used Senpai's bathroom anyway, so surely she must have a change of clothes prepared there already.

"Does Shiki-san match the figure Shiinamachi-senpai saw? Is Shiki-san tall?"

"No, she's quite short, actually."

I see… Hmm, thanks to treating it as a thinking game, otherwise, we totally could not possibly know that the deceased Shiinamachi-senpai had seen a "petite figure". The dead tell no tales was supposed to be the case.

Having become corpses, the testimony of Shiinamachi-senpai and me were totally meaningless under normal conditions.

It's just that on this occasion, Shiinamachi-senpai happened to survive and I was fortunately resurrected.

Hence, that was how the current situation arose.

"Anyway, if the number one suspect is me, then I'll say that 'Shiki-san' is the real culprit. Monjirou-senpai, does this hypothesis work?"

Kuhou smiled cheerfully while offering her conclusion to the game.

Indeed, her hypothesis was feasible, so…

All I could do was feel impressed and nod, expressing agreement.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

As a result, after summer supplementary lessons finished, I made my way to the computer lab.

If what Shiinamachi-senpai said was correct, Shiki should be staying in the computer lab caretaker's room.

Students could only enter that caretaker's room from inside the computer lab.

Not only that, normally, only teachers were allowed into the caretaker's room. Apparently, even members of the computer club weren't allowed inside either. Based on this fact, Shiki must possess quite astounding authority to be able to stay in the caretaker's room all day long.

"Excuse me for the intrusion."

I knocked and opened the door to the computer lab. Originally staring at the computer screens, the computer club members immediately turned their gazes towards me, like looking at something rare. I really wasn't used to being the center of so many people's attention.

To keep calm under everyone's gaze, I swiftly pushed up my vanity glasses.

"Could someone call Shiki for me?"

As soon as I explained my purpose here, the door in the depths of the room opened.

"Monjirou, I've been waiting a long time for you. Please come in."

Shiki poked her face out and waved to me.

"Let's do improper things together."

Shuffle shuffle!

The boys in the computer all stood up and stared at me with terrifying eyes.

"Shiki, could you give me a break? People will misunderstand if you put it like that."

"Based on my deductions, this method of seduction can elicit goodwill from all males. Anyway, please enter my room."

Shiki swiftly withdrew her face back inside, hence I had no choice but to enter the computer lab reluctantly.

Next, while feeling everyone's glares on me concretely, I passed by the lectern in front and walked to the caretaker's room's door in the depths of the room. Shiki was waiting for me there.

"This is my first time allowing a boy into the room."

Glare!

I could feel even stronger gazes.

I see. Possessing professional killing skills, I understood. These people were even more serious than I thought.

They truly wanted to murder me with their gazes. Shiki really did have a lot of fans after all.

In that sense… I couldn't help but feel sorry for them. I , too, harboured feelings of admiration for Senpai in the same student organization, so I understood how they felt as fans of Shiki.

"Sorry, Shiki and I don't have that kind of relationship. "

I tried to say that to them whereas Shiki pouted slightly. Perhaps she wanted to protest. But right now, it was more important to clear up everyone's misunderstanding.

"So, Monjirou, hurry inside. Let's do some 'good things ' in the room."

If I left her alone, Shiki was surely going to keep saying redundant things.

"Yes yes yes, got it. I'm coming in. Please have mercy on me."

Hence, I frantically escaped into the caretaker's room.

This management room was quite cool inside and very dark as well. A large device was placed near the entrance , probably what people call the base unit. That machine was giving off robotic fan noises that resounded throughout the room. Apart from that, there were documents, bookshelves and a desk. This room really looked like it was equipped with the functions of a management room.

But unlike Shiinamachi-senpai's room, this did not look like it was Shiki's personal bedroom.

"Over here, please."

In the far end of the room, there was an independent space delineated by a long curtain. Shiki was waving at me from there. That was probably Shiki's personal space. It felt like a separate room had been forcibly split off from the room.

"I've heard that boys would always search for a girl's intimate apparel when entering her room. I give you permission to do that."

"Sorry, I don't have that kind of special fetish, so I won't get excited about underwear that's worn-out from laundry and not being worn on the body."

After all, I've got a sister back home and sometimes our clothes get hung out to dry at the same time. My sister feels a little embarrassed to some extent but I don't particularly mind so my sister didn't raise any objections.

"I see. Then I will update my notes."

"I've heard that some people get extremely excited after knowing that an article of clothing had been worn by a certain person. I think this might be the difference of imagination."

"You are right. Then I will update my information as: Monjirou is only interested in underwear that's being worn on the body."

"Perhaps."

"Thank you for the lesson."

I think I'm getting gradually used to her indifferent tone of voice. While thinking that, I walked over to the other side of the heavy curtain.

Little did I expect that this was the true data center.

A large number of computer screens were executing some kind of unknown program while a number of giant boxes were producing intense fan noises. Most astounding of all, there were three keyboards set up here respectively on the front, right and left sides. Every keyboard differed in shape and looked like they each had their own uses. Even the mouse on the side was studded with large number of buttons.

Behind the chair was a simple one-person bed. Hanging on the back wall was a set of school uniform and four lab coats. In this dark, personal space, apart from sleeping, all activities could be accomplished from just the seat. It really felt like a computer expert's exclusive zone.

"Are you amazed?"

"It feels like a super hacker's room."

"But actually, all I need is this device."

Shiki took out a slightly large smartphone from the front pocket of her uniform.

"So… These computers are for sending data to the smartphone, or for processing certain data for the smartphone?"

"Nope."

"What do you mean?"

"All these decorations in the room were prepared for appearances only."

This felt like an environment where amazing programmers or day traders might work! I never expected that it was just set up for appearances.

"This room's setup started with form and appearance. After acquiring it all, I discovered that it's all unnecessary ."

"Sigh, perhaps you're right…"

In this world, even if you downsize things that you originally considered essential, in the end, you can still complete the task somehow.

"So, Monjirou, could you lie on the bed?"

The mattress was memory foam while there was a thick comforter and towel blanket on top as part of the bedding. Everything was a clean blue color without exception, giving a cold impression. In my private imagination, I thought a girl's bed should be softer instead.

"Excuse me."

That being said, as soon as I recalled that this was the bed Shiki usually slept in, I couldn't help but feel my heart rate rise a little.

"I know that you find this bed a bit narrow and not that suited for pinning down a girl to have your way with her. But don't let that worry you. Please directly act out the desires in your heart."

"I'd prefer not to hear that from a girl."

"True. Then I will take care not to hurry you before the fact from now on."

I really got the impression that this girl loved provoking others in this area way too much.

But upon a closer look, I could see faint pinkness surfacing on her face.

Perhaps she was actually unexpectedly embarrassed.

"As for drinks, which would you like? There's coffee, black tea, oolong tea and Avocado Spark."

"What's that Avo… whatever?"

"You dare to choose it? What a brave man you are."

I can't believe she thought that I already decided on that drink.

Shiki opened a small fridge next to a base unit and took out a green can.

Avocado Spark!

The can itself was printed with a vigorous logo and an illustration evocative of an avocado. The splashing pattern was especially memorable. Just like that, Shiki handed me this beverage of indeterminate taste.

Hmm, at least from first impressions, this was probably a carbonated soft drink.

"Please do share your thoughts after drinking it."

"You've never tried it?"

"Nope, because this seems like a seasonal product. So, please enjoy."

Thus, I was forced to drink it without a choice.

In that case, no helping it. I pulled the ring and brought my lips to the can.

A smell similar to leaves, difficult to describe, rushed into my nasal cavity. At the very least, I concluded that I probably wouldn't want to drink this kind of beverage if I was looking for a refreshing feeling.

I took a small sip. Hmm~ How should I describe it? It seemed a bit sweet and sour at the same time, a bit slimy and a little fizzy. I was stuck in a strange feeling of "do avocados taste like this?"

"…What a weird taste…"

"Just as I predicted."

Where the heck did she get her hands on such a strange drink? As expected, avocados were not suited for making into drinks, they're more tasty in salads or eaten with a hamburger. This canned drink made me confirm this fact once again.

"So, how did proper business go?"

I think she was asking about the results from my conversation with Fujisato and Kuhou, so I sat up straight.

Holding that can of Avocado Spark in my hands, I mentally organized the information I had heard earlier. Although I didn't want to drink more of this beverage, I didn't want to throw it away immediately.

"I asked them honestly all kinds of questions. It felt like both of them are innocent. Especially Fujisato, she has an alibi and her responses were especially natural, so I don't think she's related to this case at all."

I really can't believe that I was saying the words "has an alibi."

Then another thought popped up: this really did feel like playing a detective game.

"What about Kuhou Nagi?"

"She participated in the whole conversation with great enthusiasm. In that sense, if she really is the culprit, then she's way too proactive. Not only that, she even helped me organize the facts."

After doing so much hypothesizing, I'd really jump in fright if she turned around and say 'but actually, I'm the culprit.' Hence, I also believed that she seemed to be innocent.

"So that's her attitude. I get it."

Shiki kept nodding.

Her bangs covered both her eyes so I couldn't read her face at all. So what exactly was Shiki thinking? What did she think of the entire affair? I had no idea at all.

"Any other clues?"

"Lemme think…"

I felt a bit troubled, unsure whether I should report this to Shiki.

I gathered information as carefully as I could, but as an expert information-gatherer, Shiki probably understood more than me, so I decided to disclose everything to her without reservation.

"According to Kuhou, she thinks you're the most suspicious."

"Indeed that is true."

Shiki's voice seemed to be giving off a slightly delighted sense of excitement.

"After hearing her say that, I found it logical too. Indeed, if you're the culprit, Shiki, then even without using a gift, I think you still seem to be able to do all of it. "

"True."

She was accepting the idea extremely calmly, causing me to think 'could it really be her…"?

But this was most likely Shiki's characteristic messing with others.

I totally had no idea who was right. Under such conditions, I once again concluded that I wasn't cut out to be a detective.

I really hoped that Shiki could take the detective's role, but unfortunately, the most suited person was also the most suspicious person at the moment.

And the one who pointed that out was also the prime suspect as well.

Should I believe in Shiki or Kuhou…? That's what the situation now felt like.

"In other words, no matter who the culprit, as long as they possess a Gift, then it would make it more likely for them to be able to achieve the crime committed."

Shiki raised a finger and began to give her opinion.

"If the culprit didn't use a Gift to achieve their goal, then I am the prime suspect. In hindsight, this is a most natural conclusion, isn't that right?"

"According to Kuhou, that's how it is. Oh my, I'd feel so much happier if the culprit turns out to be a totally unrelated third person…"

"Why?"

"Because I want to get along with everyone peacefully! "

I voiced my feelings honestly, causing Shiki's mouth to open slightly in an O-shape.

Was what I said that weird?

I believe that it should be very logical…

"Monjirou, you are really an amusing person. After talking to you, I've concluded that I was right in deciding to take an interest in you. Introducing you to Kaguya was definitely worth it."

Seeing Shiki acting in a way I've never seen before, I really didn't understand why she would introduce me to Shiinamachi-senpai.

"Until a few years ago, you were simply brought up with the goal of becoming a killing machine. But right now, you have become this plain and ordinary… four-eyed boy with 'an average high schooler's perspective'. It's because you're that kind of person that …"

To think she knew that much about my background… It really impressed upon me: she possesses a "special power."

"Because you are that kind of person, that's why I found you very 'amusing' and developed an interest in you."

"…Shiki…?"

Just at this moment--

I suddenly felt my vision go seemingly dark, bit by bit, and the world before my eyes growing distorted.

"I'd really like to know, how far you can go, ultimately. "

The world began to spin nonstop.

Shiki also seemed to have noticed my abnormal state. She shoved my lightly.

Instantly, unable to resist, I fell back on the bed.

What the heck… What's going on?

"Yes, I really would like to test out everything about you."

Next, Shiki laid herself on my body. Having lost all my strength, I totally unable to resist.

Lying on my immobile body, Shiki examined my face from close range.

At this moment, I saw it.

Her other eye was shining with golden light.

Possessing one blue and one golden eye, Shiki smiled faintly.

I could feel a sense of beauty contrary to reality, so beautiful that it made one shudder. I felt myself shivering from the bottom of my heart--Was this what people called terror?

"Monjirou."

Shiki touched my face with her ice-cold hands.

Thanks to that icy feeling, I was barely able to retain my consciousness.

The can of Avocado Spark fell on the ground with a clong. Even in my hazy consciousness, I finally realized--

I was drugged.

In other words, some kind of drug had been mixed into that weird juice.

"According to my judgment, Kaguya has accepted you with equally favorable impressions. I find that most agreeable."

Shiki's face was getting closer and closer to me.

That shining golden eye kept approaching me.

That color and luster made me recall a certain kind of entity transcending human intelligence.

Inside there was even a kind of magical power, enough to ensnare human hearts.

Compared to my past, this girl was even more terrifying.

Just looking at that eye, it made my body instinctively reach this kind of conclusion.

Precisely because of that, this girl normally kept that eye covered. If one kept staring into that golden eye, it felt like one's soul would be taken in the end, even to the point of no return.

Although my consciousness was slipping away gradually, I still had to ask in confirmation:

"Shiki, are… you… the culprit…?"

I spoke in fragments, unable to say the entire question normally. Also, I could no longer maintain my remaining consciousness.

"Sakuradamon Jirou, go to sleep like this."

Then Shiki urged me with an unprecedentedly sweet voice.

--In that manner, I totally lost consciousness.

Chapter 3 A-Part - Life and Mind

■Search Results for "date":

- a particular day on the calendar.
- an agreed upon time for opposite genders to meet up.
- the word "date" originally meant the day of the month but gradually took on the meaning of "a man and a woman agreeing on a time, then meeting up at that time."
- a man and a woman making a promise to go out without interference from others.

Hence, Shiinamachi-senpai and I were strolling along the seashore on a date.

I don't quite understand either how this happened. After a convoluted process, that was how the situation developed--

"Jirou-kun, what's with you?"

Shiinamachi-senpai's attire was probably what one would call a white shoulder-less one-piece dress. The skirt's hem was decorated with many layers of frills and she looked like an angel to me. The white straw hat was also an excellent match for her dress and made her look like a sheltered classy young lady.

Anyway, I felt very happy to be able to go on a date with Senpai.

"Nothing much, I'm just feeling so elated to be on a date with you, Senpai."

Senpai in casual clothing and even exposing her shoulders and collarbone, I really didn't know how to get along with her.

Of course, I knew that I could just treat her the usual way, but I really couldn't remember how I usually got along with Senpai.

"Fufu, actually… I feel a little nervous too."

Senpai seemed a little shy, her cheeks getting red… That's absolutely unfair.

"I'm nervous too."

"Yes, I can see that. Your glasses look like they're about to mist over."

"Eh?"

I frantically took down my glasses and vigorously rubbed the mist off the lenses.

"Should be fine now."

"Oh I'm sorry, I was just joking with you…"

To think it was just a joke… And I even failed to respond normally to Senpai's joke, clearly I'm really far too nervous.

"But it's great that I got a chance to see you without your glasses, Jirou-kun."

"Ooh…"

Senpai looked up cheerfully at me. The heat rising from my body seemed to make my glasses mist up again.

Right now, the feeling I have is… There was one sun hanging high in the sky, and there also seemed to be another sun down below.

"But someone should be targeting you currently, Shiinamachi-senpai, is it really okay for us to be strolling outside?"

"Hmm… Well…"

Senpai made a troubled look then said:

"The story mentioned that certain things might happen tonight, so perhaps trying to get targeted might be our goal."

"Certain things? That sounds quite ambiguous, you know?"

"The 'stories' of the Nightkin are often cryptic in content. The basic content of the stories mostly consist of vague explanations. For example, they might mention 'a certain incident might be encountered in the future', 'on a certain day, certain things might happen' etc, and most of the endings aren't very clear."

So the Nightkin's stories were really ambiguous. When I first heard the term "story", I was thinking there would be more detailed content recorded in them…

"However, the majority is… How should I say it…? In my story, it seems that there are many dangerous parts so that's why Shiki says I need vassals who can contribute in powerful ways. But because… I'm almost unable to interact with boys, so…"

Born in a family of killers, I was forced to learn all sorts of professional skills. Combined with the fact that I had feelings for Senpai, that's probably why Shiki recommended me to her.

"So, why are you able to interact with me?"

"…I don't know either. Somehow it feels like there's a nostalgic smell coming from you, Jirou-kun."

I couldn't help but bring my hand to my nose to sniff.

"Fufu, I don't mean that kind of smell. I'm referring to a certain kind of atmosphere. For some reason, whenever I'm with you, Jirou-kun, I get a reassuring feeling."

"I-In that case, I'm very glad about that."

"Yes, I feel very glad too!"

Seeing Senpai's reassured smile, I really felt thankful that I was able to exude this kind of aura.

"I understand. Since the story says something will happen, is there any related information mentioned?"

"Let me think… The story uses Nightkin language so I can only try my best to express the linguistic feeling. Translated directly, it feels like the event mentioned is something like 'the story's real beginning is a path that gradually becomes clear amidst the gap between life and death'."

…I see. That definitely was cryptic. I recalled how I wasn't able to understand the full meaning of foreign books when reading in English.

"The story is roughly composed by forms resembling poetry. So that's why I wanted to say, since it mentions ' real beginning', then probably… It means that certain events will happen."

"You're right, that sentence really does give a feeling like something's gonna happen."

Rather than ambiguous, it would be better to call the story a guessing game. It was impossible to know what was actually going to happen.

"When you invited me, Senpai, what was in the story?"

"Oh, hmm, umm… It was something like 'The arrival of death, the joy of rebirth, the bonds of involvement'."

…Even after the event had happened already, I still found the story's contents rather difficult to understand.

'The arrival of death' probably hinted at Senpai's death . 'The joy of rebirth' represented… What did it actually mean? 'The bonds of involvement' referred to my becoming Senpai's vassal, so I'm quite happy about that.

"A Nightkin's story is so hard to understand. Is every day's story like that?"

"No. It's only recorded in this format if it's a special day."

In other words, life every single day was ambiguous and cryptic? Or it meant that no matter how the story's possessor spent their days, it was impossible to evade the content mentioned by the story? The more I thought about it, the harder it felt to understand.

"Today is a rare chance so that's why we're going out on a date. I'd like to investigate what does 'gap between life and death' actually refer to."

Senpai's suggestion was unexpectedly proactive, surprising me a little.

Although Senpai was being targeted for sure, she did not run away but decided to confront things head on instead.

The enemy was someone who had killed Senpai and me using advanced skills.

Not only that, Senpai also knew that the enemy seemed to have some kind of Gift.

My power was quite plain, simply "not going to die" but if used flexibly, I should be able to use it to accomplish many things.

In the worst case, I can at least serve as Senpai's shield.

Thinking that, I decided at the same time to observe the situation carefully in this area.

This national route followed the long coastline. It was currently summer so there were many cars passing through. Traffic congestion could even be seen up ahead. Beyond the railings was a vast seashore, lively as ever. People were making noise on the beach while the beach restaurant was totally packed.

There were no tall buildings on the other side of the sea so there was no need to worry about someone sniping Senpai from there. But if someone made a move on Senpai then mixed into the crowd, it would be very difficult to search for them.

…I suddenly realized that Shiinamachi-senpai was looking up, staring intently at me.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing, I just wanted to say that your eyes suddenly looked so serious."

"Oh…"

Crap. I was too preoccupied with thinking about the killer's actions that I accidentally allowed my thoughts to show on my face. I can't believe I'm doing something so insensitive when given the rare chance to have a stroll with Senpai.

"Sorry, was my face scary just now?"

"No, I found it very cool."

What!?

This prompted a "everything is okay" feeling in me. Senpai is such a tease! Oh, so my face actually looked very cool? In that case, I shouldn't mind that much. But upon further thought, it also meant that I don't look that cool ordinarily? Well true, I think my face has quite some way to go before it can be considered that of a pretty boy's.

"Fufu, Jirou-kun, you really do think seriously about everything, don't you?"

"Part of it is because I'm not too used to thinking over things in a half-assed manner…"

I used to lead a life without any emotions. Even now, I'm still often lost about whether my behaviour could be counted as normal.

Although my sister had thoroughly instructed me on all sorts of common sense knowledge of normal people and there shouldn't be too big of a problem, whenever I encounter exceptional people and situations like Shiinamachi-senpai, I couldn't help but feel a bit confused.

I know that the current "me" was actually cultivated only recently. So when interacting with people, I'm always trying hard to feel my way around. As long as the situation permitted, I hope to be able to face everyone with a sincere attitude. I probably think that because I hope to really treasure the current "me" who can act like a normal person.

"But I don't want to talk about such a scary topic right now."

"Meaning that…"

"Jirou-kun, let's have a normal date!"

This sentence was repeated from what Senpai said to me last night.

Hearing this sentence alone was enough to make my heart pound uncontrollably. That also made me feel quite troubled.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Let's rewind back to last night.

After Shiki drugged me, I apparently feel into a coma.

By the time I recovered consciousness, it was already midnight.

"…?"

I had just noticed a sweet fragrance when a soft and tender sensation came from my lips.

"…Hmm…?"

My head still felt hazy as I struggled to open my eyes, only to find Shiinamachi-senpai's face right in front of me .

"!?"

"Oh Jirou-kun, you've woken up?"

Sitting on the bedside, Senpai smiled gently and covered her lips slightly shyly.

This action, this fragrance, that sensation just now.

Could… Could Senpai really have done *that* to me just now…?

"E-Excuse me, Senpai? My lips just now…"

"Fufu, try and take a guess. Because you looked so full of openings just now."

Senpai's mischievous behaviour and giggling expression made my heart race instantly.

If things really turned out as I thought and Senpai had actually kissed me, then how could I just lie here casually

? But if Senpai only played a small prank and used something such as her fingers to imitate lips, then I…

…No matter what, it was still nice.

In other words, no matter what Senpai did to me, I still felt happy. That's the conclusion.

"You startled me. If possible, I'd like you to do it again, Senpai…"

"No, no way. Since you're already awake, I can't do that kind of thing to you while you're conscious."

Senpai's cheeks went bright red.

From the way things looked, my guess might be right after all.

Okay, I'll assumed that it really was Senpai's kiss just now and savor the happy feeling in my mind carefully.

But anyway, let's put that aside for now.

"Uh…?"

The place I woke up seemed to be the same as where I had fallen unconscious, the computer lab's management room.

I scanned for Shiki but she didn't seem to be present.

"Oh, Shiki-san is currently in my room. I think she's probably taking a bath."

"Really?"

"You're very concerned about Shiki-san?"

Of course, she suddenly drugged me and put me in coma, how could I not feel concerned? And before falling unconscious, I saw that terrifying golden eye. A normal girl couldn't possibly give off that kind of pressure and terrifying aura.

But what Senpai just said about "concern" felt like it wasn't referring to that.

"In terms of suspiciousness, I am very concerned about her, but if I had to comment about her as a girl…"

No wait. Shiinamachi-senpai was Shiki's friend after all. If I said I wasn't concerned about her at all, wouldn't it make Senpai feel angry or sad?

For example…

'Jirou-kun, I can't believe you're saying such things about my friend. That's so cold of you. Hmph!'

In the past, my little sister asked me to comment on her friend. I simply answered 'I think she's kind of cute but I don't feel anything towards her. I think she'll grow up to be quite a beauty' but my sister inexplicably scowled at me. I can't let Senpai react with the same thoughts as my sister back then.

My sister tirelessly reminded me again and again: women's thoughts are very complicated.

"I think that there are cute parts to her personality, but in terms of level…"

"Hmm?"

"Personally, the one I'm most concerned about is still you, Shiinamachi-senpai."

"Hmm… I-Is that so…?"

Why are you here? What have I gotten myself swept up into? In that sense, Senpai was definitely the one I'm most concerned about right now.

'Seeing Senpai's face getting redder and redder, in that sense, I am really concerned about Senpai!'--I really wanted to say that, but the situation and mood hadn't really reached that point, so I endured it for now.

"But what exactly happened?"

I was totally lost.

Although Shiinmachi-senpai looked just as cute as usual even in a dark room, apart from that, I totally had no grasp on the situation.

"I think it's most likely one of Shiki-san's experiments?"

"Experiment?"

"Yes, a death experiment."

Being raised from childhood as a professional killer, I had no right to say anything, but this kind of experiment really was too dangerous!

"What you mean is…"

"Shiki-san had you drink a drug, Jirou-san, trying to test out the extent you can resurrect. It's probably that kind of experiment."

Undoubtedly, it was very dangerous.

"That's totally murder!"

"Yes. But Shiki-san said that she only put you fully in a state of suspended animation."

"…Oh really? Hmm… okay."

I couldn't help but groan.

The "killer" mentality in my brain was working subconsciously so I couldn't help but think 'if death didn't happen, it's a failure' but I decided to forget these things for now and think like an ordinary school boy.

…I fainted, hence this could be construed as assault, how about that? No, I couldn't find any abnormal signs on my body so this probably wouldn't be very convincing.

Immortality was quite inconvenient in situations like these. At this rate, I felt that Shiki could indifferently say "because I feel deeply interested" any time then perform experiments on me as if was the most natural thing.

"No, this isn't good at al. I must complain to her properly!"

That's right. Even if I'll just end up feeling compelled to forgive her, I must let her know that some things were unacceptable.

"Yes, I think it's a good a idea but isn't it time for you to go home?"

Yeah, that's right. It should be late night already, if I don't go home, my sister will be worried.

"Umm… What time is it now?"

"Midnight just happened to pass."

I guess the excuse "a bit of a night excursion" should still work at this time.

If my sister came home at this kind of hour, I'd definitely not forgive her. As soon as our positions were switched, I feel that it's okay as a boy… That's right, that's the kind of feeling I have.

However, I totally hadn't called my sister and that's truly bad. But ultimately, if my sister said to me "I thought you ran into danger" and I answered "actually I died", my sister will probably think there were something wrong with my brain instead of worrying about me.

I decided to tell my sister honestly that I was actually staying late at school.

"Well then, hmm… I guess I'd better get home."

"Yes, I think it's a good idea too."

Shiinamachi-senpai smiled and expressed agreement.

"Senpai, tonight… You'll be fine, right?"

Senpai didn't quite seem to understand my question for a moment.

She blinked her eyes before saying:

"Fufu, it'll be fine. Or rather, as long as I stay in school, I'll be safe all the time."

Hearing the word "safe", I recalled what Senpai had said about a safe day previous.

Senpai, you got killed on your safe day… I couldn't help but think that.

"Oh, today really will be fine, so…"

"…So? But last night actually wasn't fine… Was it?"

I couldn't help but seek confirmation. Senpai went bright red and nodded at me.

…There was clearly something wrong with that day yet Senpai told me it was a safe day and not to worry.

Upon further thought, I found this conversation quite adult in flavour, doesn't it feel that way?

"No, that day was truly a safe day."

Ever time I heard Senpai say those words in that calm tone of voice, I couldn't help but feel my heart pounding uncontrollably.

Breath out, calm down, Jirou, calm down.

"That night, I didn't check carefully before opening the door because I knew you were coming. Normally speaking, as long as I don't open the door to that room, no one can enter my room at all."

"No one can enter your room at all…?"

"Yes, even if they try to use a Gift. Even if they try to teleport, they still can't get inside. My room is protected using a special technique. Simply stated, there's a barrier."

I see. That night, Senpai accidentally let the culprit in because she thought it was me, in the end leading to her murder.

Actually, that meant that I had indirectly caused Senpai to come to harm. As soon as I thought that, I couldn't help but feel quite regretful.

"Fufu… Seeing you worry about me, Jirou-kun, I really feel happy. It'll be hard to say goodbye if we keep staying here so let me see you off to the school entrance."

"Oh okay, after all, it's not far from the clock tower."

The school's back door led to a mixed forest. Having Senpai see me off at that small metal gate should be fine.

At the same time, I was thinking: After all, Shiki was apparently in Senpai's room in the clock tower…

Next, I suddenly felt that everything was very suspicious.

"Oh right, Shiki could be the culprit."

I told Senpai about Kuhou's conjecture.

"Really?"

"Yes. I was discussing the case with Fujisato and Kuhou. Kuhou was participating quite a lot… She thinks that there are three suspects, Senpai, me and Shiki."

"I see. Speaking of which, I guess we didn't suspect ourselves."

Shiinamachi-senpai pondered as she looked up.

Then she nodded.

"Shiki-san is my vassal so I think she should be fine…"

Indeed, after all, Shiki was her knight and vassal so there shouldn't be a problem. I'd like to believe that too.

Nevertheless, something much more frightening must be hidden behind that golden eye of hers.

"If Shiki-san wanted to kill me, she should be able to do it any time without choosing a safe day on purpose."

"After listening to you, Senpai, I guess that makes sense…"

Senpai was definitely right.

For example, if Shiki did not intend to make a move after gaining Senpai's full trust, then there was no need for her to pick Senpai's "safe day" to murder her. Although it was also possible that she could have performed a death experiment on Senpai like how she tested my body's abilities, in that case, everything would have been simply a criminal act for personal enjoyment and causing trouble for the sake of trouble.

Also, if it really was her, I think she would have stepped up to say "actually, I'm the culprit" when Senpai and I resurrected.

"Oh, by the way."

"Hmm?"

"Didn't you say before that if you died, Senpai, I'll die as well?"

If I remembered right, it was after the first time I died and resurrected…

'You're right. If I were to die again, you would lose your life as well.'

I think she said that to me back when I was lying on her lap.

"Oh, that's right! Because your immortality is linked to my life, Jirou-kun."

"Linked with… Senpai, what does that mean?"

"Yes, actually, strictly speaking, you're not actually immortal. If I were to die, then you'll die as well."

So that's the situation? In that case, my responsibilities were truly heavy.

In other words, I must protect Senpai's life securely.

It really felt like being a knight and made me feel a little proud.

"What about Shiki? Will she die as a result of your death, Senpai?"

"Hmm, that doesn't apply to other vassals."

Speaking of which, Shiki was the possibly the culprit who murdered Senpai.

If like me, killing Senpai would be equivalent to suicide for her, then all that would become impossible.

"Well, Jirou-kun…"

Stopping there, Senpai suddenly looked like she wanted to say something but felt hesitant.

With blushing cheeks, she secretly glanced at me with shy eyes.

"Basically, how should I put this? …On dangerous days… I hope you'll stay by my side the whole time… W-Will you?"

On dangerous days, staying by her side.

Sigh, Jirou, could your heart stop beating madly every time you hear certain keywords, come on!?

"Of course there's no problem. Even if my life was not tied to yours, Senpai, I still hope to protect you, Senpai."

I clenched my fist hard and vowed to Senpai.

"Yes… Thank you."

Senpai placed her hand on my fist, showing a calm smile.

Her slightly cool hand made me feel very comfortable.

"But, staying by my side the whole time… Hmm… That feels so embarrassing."

"Actually, I feel embarrassed too."

I made an embarrassed smile at the demure Senpai.

"Oh right, Jirou-kun."

Next, Senpai seemed to recall something, her eyes widening until they were round.

"You don't have summer supplementary lessons tomorrow, right? Jirou-kun, let's have a normal date!"

That was the sudden proposal she offered me.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Then that was how things developed to the current situation.

"Fufu."

Shiinamachi-senpai seemed quite happy just to be strolling, making me feel quite relieved because I was originally racking my brain, worrying about what conversation topics were appropriate for a date.

Just looking at Senpai's face from the side, I felt very satisfied already.

It was hard to believe that she was a Nightkin and that someone even wanted to kill her. If possible, I really hoped she could live a carefree life, away from all such conflict.

Then at that instant--

I sensed an unusual presence so I swiftly swept Senpai off her feet and into my arms.

"Kyah!? J-J-J-J-J-Jirou-kun!?"

"Don't speak, Senpai."

I knew what the presence I had just sensed.

Back when my mother was doing the "from this moment on, I will really kill you, so do everything you can to detect the presence and evade my attack" training, that was the kind of feeling I got from my mother's gaze.

However, where exactly was it coming from…? I searched desperately with my eyes.

"Sorry!"

I pushed Senpai down on the roadside and put up my index finger, making a hush gesture.

"Mmm… Mkay."

Senpai swallowed the scream she was about to make and desperately covered her mouth, trying to suppress the urge to scream.

The sound of wind slicing flew past our previous location.

Then a flying knife embedded itself into the ground ahead of where we had hit the ground.

"!"

I could feel Senpai gasp.

Faced with this obvious attack, I immediately got up on my knees to shield Senpai.

Where did the attack come from? Ordinary people were walking past us, all of them showing frightened looks at our sudden action. Cars were driving along the road. These people looked like they had not noticed that Shiinamachi-senpai and I had been attacked. Even if there was a knife stuck in the ground, it probably wouldn't occur to them that someone had thrown it to kill us.

Furthermore, the same went for "my current self".

At this rate, affected by excessive information in the surroundings, I will become unable to narrow down who I should be wary off. Not only must I *protect Shiinamachi-senpai* but I also had to prevent the culprit from attacking ordinary bystanders and definitely could not let pedestrians notice that a small battle was taking place here. With all these preconditions plus the added requirement of making appropriate decisions on the spot, this was too difficult for me with a normal high school boy's mind and rich set of emotions.

…If this continued, Senpai and I would get caught up in the enemy's manipulations.

If that was the case, what if I used the power sealed in my right shoulder? That should be enough to handle things, right?

I touched my right shoulder lightly with my left hand and found that it was giving off heat right now.

'When using the power sealed inside the scar, you must have the resolve to abandon everything. This " everything" means "all things". Once you use that ability, the power of a killer's clan will surely enable you to resolve the difficulty at hand. But the final result will be that you might lose everything, so no one can decide whether it is the right decision. You must grow up as quickly as possible to become a person who can make that decision.'

I recalled my mother's words and corrected my thinking just now. Now was not yet the time to abandon everything. What I ought to do was focus and carefully protect what's before me.

I picked up the knife embedded in the sidewalk and entered a combat ready stance. Taking off my glasses, I closed both eyes to focus my concentration. I had only one precondition to getting out of this difficult situation--

Protect Shiinamachi-senpai.

This point also pertained to whether other people would get hurt, hence…

Inside that dark space… I felt some kind of stinging object in the corner of my consciousness.

"Eat this!"

While opening both eyes, I threw the knife towards where my consciousness was feeling the stinging pain.

On the other side of the road, thirty meters from here, was a dark civilian dwelling. The house was separated from my current location by a clearing and the road. Using just the naked eye, it was impossible to tell if there was anyone inside that house. The enemy must have hidden either by beside the wall or inside the house. From that position, it was very hard to throw a knife using ordinary methods towards us, so it was possible that the enemy was using some kind of firing device or possessed some kind of special technique.

Clang.

The sound of hard objects colliding was heard from the clearing between me and the hourse.

The knife I threw had flown roughly ten meters, striking the attacker's knife in midair, the two knives falling to the ground and making that noise after colliding.

In the past, I always failed to strike down my mother's knives and many times, the knives even stabbed into my body. But this time, the speed of the enemy's knife was inferior to my mother's, hence--I succeeded.

"Eh, just now…"

Senpai asked with a face full of worry.

I originally thought the enemy would attack again, but --

The killing intent directed towards us suddenly vanished as though nothing had happened in the first place.

Then I heard a commotion in the surroundings.

Although I really wanted to head over to that house to confirm the situation, I couldn't leave Senpai alone unattended. After all, that could very well be what the enemy wanted.

I decided to observe for now… Soon after, I decided that things had probably become safe.

I put on my vanity glasses again.

"Phew… Senpai, are you okay?"

Senpai still kept her hands on her mouth. Staring with wide-open eyes, she looked up at me.

"Oh it's fine now, you can talk."

Saying that, I extended a hand to Senpai.

I gripped her hand firmly and pulled her up.

"J-Jirou-kun, you're so amazing!"

"Huh?"

"I already heard Shiki-san mention before, but you really are very amazing! When you threw that knife, I felt my heart beating so fast!"

Wow, hearing Senpai say that makes me so happy!

Not only that, I looked around… and found many people around us, some of them looking with an expression of disbelief at us while walking by. Others were simply sitting in their cars.

One could hardly blame them. Suddenly on the street, I had embraced Senpai and pushed her to the ground then picked up something and thrown it pretentiously. Those people most likely thought they had chanced upon some kind of weird performance.

"Wah~~ Jirou-kun, you were so great… Ehehe!"

Senpai swooned almost as though she were a fan who had met her idol.

Because Senpai always seemed so detached from reality, I felt quite surprised to see her acting this way.

But Senpai was really cute this way too. Hence, all of it was justice.

"It does scare me to be targeted… But Jirou-kun, your actions are even more astounding to me. Thank you so much!"

"Oh, i-it's nothing. I'm glad you're okay, Senpai."

"Yes! I'm fine!"

Senpai expressed her safety to me in a lively manner.

A layer of warmth seemed to suddenly appear in the eyes of the pedestrians and car passengers watching us.

Yeah, it's true. From others' point of view, we probably looked like an idiot couple sitting on the roadside.

The term "idiot couple" sounded a bit outdated. Next time, I'd better ask my sister to see if there's a more fashionable way of calling couples who engage in public displays of affection.

"I've heard that the two of you are currently having a date that shouldn't be taking place, so I came on purpose to have a look."

"Huh!?"

Hearing a voice, Senpai and I both looked back in surprise at the same time. Standing there was Shiki with her head tilted in puzzlement.

Even in such sweltering weather, she was still wearing a lab coat over her uniform with her hands buried in her pockets as usual. She must be hot, dressed like that… But there was not a single sweat drop on Shiki's face.

"Y-Yeah…"

I couldn't help but answer and got up together with Senpai.

Shiki stared at us through her bangs while saying:

"There are two throwing knives dropped on the clearing over there. I have already picked them up just now."

Having said that, she extended her hand out from her pocket, presenting two knives held in her hand. One was the knife I had thrown after picking up while the other was an identical knife that had struck the knife I threw back. Both knives showed cracks apparently caused by the impact.

"Did you throw the knives?"

"No. Regrettably, I don't possess that level of physical ability and skill."

Shiki immediately returned the two knives to her pocket and swiftly brought her face up close.

I felt that the blue eye was flashing with a certain light.

"Monjirou, you are definitely worthy as the one I selected. Despite not having a Gift in this area, you not only evaded the assassin's knife but was even able to counterattack. What amazing skills."

"You saw it?"

"No problem. I have been watching all along ever since the two of you started your date."

I totally had no idea where there was a problem in the first place but her explanation definitely made me feel quite embarrassed.

"The assassin doesn't seem to be in that empty house anymore. Did the perpetrator use a Gift? Or like you, it was purely superb skills? I have yet to deduce the answer to these questions. Sorry."

"Oh, most of that doesn't matter…"

So Shiki was observing the situation all along and even gathering information for us?

Although I felt that Shiki was a girl I couldn't lower my guard against, she was quite reliable indeed.

Just as such feelings sprouted in my heart, I suddenly remembered that she had just drugged me last night.

"By the way, what did you put in my drink yesterday?
"

"I later tried out that can of Avocado Spark. That taste was certainly quite stimulating for the taste buds."

"Yeah, it really is…"

Think thinking about it made me feel like the disgusting taste was surging form the back of my throat.

Feeling that indescribable odor reaching my nose, I instantly felt drained of strength.

"Uh, no, that's not the question I've asking!"

"You're asking about the drug? I am deeply sorry about what happened."

Shiki bowed deeply to apologize to me.

How unexpected. I never expected her to apologize so honestly.

"O-Oh."

It made me unable to complain further.

"As Kaguya's guardian together with Monjirou, I have decided to perform further tests to confirm the extent of Monjirou's immortality. Stabbed and drugged to death have been verified, so I must next test out death by strangling, bludgeoning, grinding, crushing, incinerating, cursing, beheading, dehydrating, annihilating…"

"Hold on hold on hold on hold on hold on!"

Hearing Shiki say a series of extremely dangerous words, I immediately stopped her frantically.

"What?"

"That's going way overboard! It sounds like you intend to try everything out on me for real!"

"Jirou's hearing confirmed to be normal. Very good."

"Good my ass! You can't be serious in wanting to test everything on me once?"

"Jirou's ability to grasp the situation confirmed to be excellent. Congratulations."

"Congratulations like hell! What's there to congratulate about!? Shiki!"

No good. This girl looked like she was serious.

"Also, I can't believe you even want to annihilate me."

"I really want to know what would result if you were annihilated together with your physical form. I intend to test it through an explosion."

"No no, I'll surely die!"

"If you die, the experiment ends."

"No matter what, absolutely no!"

"Then may I ask what extent is okay with you?"

"No extent is fine! Anyway, killing is wrong!"

"It's totally unconvincing to hear that coming from you ."

I was a professional killer and immortal as well. Indeed, it was not very convincing.

"Uh… W-Well, I haven't actually killed anyone, I should have the right to say that!"

"I see. So that's the case?"

Resting a finger on the side of her lip while looking down, Shiki seemed to be pondering something.

"So, how about a double kill?"

"That's a baseball term! You mean double play!"

"You and Kaguya already encountered it."

The culprit first killed Shiinamachi-senpai then killed me, thus achieving a double kill. I see.

"Perhaps you think your lame joke works well this time, but you're totally wrong!"

"How regrettable. Lame puns are hard to understand."

I couldn't help but feel plunged into annoyance.

Watching me arguing with Shiki, Shiinamachi-senpai seemed to have concluded we were performing some kind of comedy routine, bursting out with a chuckle on the side.

"Shiki-san, Jirou-kun, you two are such great friends."

"No, but if possible, I hope you can help me out here, Senpai."

"Fufu."

Senpai partially closed her eyes and smiled at me. Seeing that, I was unable to say anything more.

Yes, Senpai really was a woman who could easily get away with crimes!

"--Oh, however…"

"Hmm?"

"Back in the bathroom, you already got seduced to death by Kaguya, right?"

"That counts as a cause of death too?"

"I believe that joke was not bad."

"Shiki-san, y-you're so annoying…"

Going red in the cheeks, Senpai finally spoke to restrain Shiki.

I see, so once the sexual harassment involves Senpai, Senpai will speak out against it?

"Sigh, in that sense, Senpai truly has my life and death under her control."

"I see, that's quite well said."

"So annoying, even Jirou-kun is joining in to make fun of me!"

Senpai turned her face away a little displeased. I couldn't help but smile quietly at the sight of that.

If possible, I really hoped Senpai could continue living peacefully like this, serving as the girl who soothed my heart and soul.

On the other hand, it was quite fun for us to be chatting as a trio.

Same for the day when the murder happened. Perhaps it was all thanks to Shiki's brand of behavior, doing and saying whatever she wanted.

However, I really wished from the bottom of my heart that she won't try killing me again.

"I'll let you know later… The conditions for Jirou-kun's resurrection. Is that okay, Shiki-san?"

"Yes. In that case, those tests and experiments won't be necessary."

"I'd like to know myself as well."

I was quite surprised to learn that there were conditions capable of killing me, at the same time, it meant that if those conditions were not met, I was immortal. It was a strange feeling, knowing that I had become someone that was difficult to kill.

Suddenly, I noticed that Shiki, who was the most interested in those death conditions, seemed to be staring at me.

Lately, I found my self more and more able to sense her gaze behind her bangs.

"Monjirou, were you originally thinking of using ' something' just now?"

Her tone was indifferent as always, but there was a certain kind of cold emotion in her voice.

"…Inside my right shoulder's scar is a forbidden power."

"Its use is limited?"

"Yeah."

Shiki couldn’t possibly be satisfied with just this explanation but she did not pry any further.

Perhaps it was because Shiinamachi-senpai made a worried and uneasy face again.

If possible, I really didn't want to tell Senpai that I possessed a power "that might cause me to lose everything."

"Understood. Okay, let's go."

Saying that, Shiki swiftly started walking.

"Hmm? To where?"

"A place where dates must go."

Shiki pointed at a small island. It was a sightseeing island with a bridge connected to the land where we were, allowing us to walk directly to the island. Over there were all sorts of shops, viewing platforms, caves, an excellent spot for dates.

"Great, then let's go there now!"

Shiinamachi-senpai seemed quite enthusiastic and I nodded.

However, the assassin seemed to have observed our movements before attacking with the throwing knives.

Since the enemy had showed killing intent, of course he or she meant to kill us. If that really was the case, I found it quite incredible that he or she would do it in broad daylight. To be honest, unless the knives struck extremely precisely, it was very difficult to kill using throwing knives in one hit. More precisely, it was only possible to take the target's life by piercing the throat, the head or the heart. Apart from attacking the throat, it was very hard to achieve "precision".

Regarding the heart, I've already explained to Shiki and Senpai before. The heart itself was a mass of muscle and needed substantial force to successfully pierce. As for the head was covered by the skull which had a curved shape. Even attacking with bullets, deflection was possible and difficult to cause fatal wounds from a distance. Hence, when killing, the throat should be aimed… But the throat was a small target and required a certain level of skill. In other words, even if the enemy was a highly skilled killer, assassination using throwing knives was still unlikely to succeed.

I think the enemy was only trying to test my abilities.

I looked over at the house just now.

"Jirou-kun, hurry up."

Shiinamachi-senpai had apparently calmed down from the fear of getting ambushed. I saw her waving at me from a distance not too far away.

"Okay, I'll be right there."

I hastily ran forward, meanwhile feeling even more sure that someone was currently targeting us.

This fact further heightened my internal vigilance.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Walking along the long bridge, reaching the island--

"Oh my, isn't that…"

I looked in the direction Shiki pointed and found Fujisato and Kuhou standing in front of the souvenir shop opposite the parking lot.

Although we just had lunch together yesterday, it was quite a rare sight to see the two of them together. Fujisato was my classmate but did not join the library monitors or any clubs. Kuhou was a member of the library monitors and also part of the kendo club, but we were in different year groups. In other words, although both girls were having lunch with me yesterday, it still felt quite unexpected for me to see them going out as close friends.

They also seemed to notice us. The two girls instantly showed an incredulous expression.

"Hey! Monjirou, I'd never expect you to be out on a date with two girls at once!"

Fujisato pointed at me, surprise written all over her face.

"Oh dear, Senpai really isn't to be underestimated."

Kuhou added as well. Arms crossed before her chest, she was smiling.

"Hello. What a rare combination to see you two together!"

Fujisato was wearing clothes very similar to what you'd find in fashion magazines, all of her attire consisted of this year's summer fashion. In contrast, Kuhou was wearing well-fitting clothing suited to her own whims, the very image of her personality. Having two almost completely opposite people together actually gave off a feeling of a good match. I couldn't help but feel a bit touched to be able to admire the view of them out of school clothing.

"Yes, we just happened to meet by chance in the streets . Oh right, I never expected you guys to appear as well. That's even more surprising to me?"

"Perhaps so-called fate does bring people together. I'm very happy to run into you."

If all this could be attributed to fate, of course it was worth celebrating. However, the attack just now made me suspicious whether this was all coincidental. But considering the time the attack took place, it seemed as though these two girls who were already here might be innocent.

"Shiinamachi-senpai, hello!"

"Senpai, hello again after seeing you yesterday."

"Oh, hello to you two. I'm very happy to be running into you here too."

Hearing Senpai's answer, the two girls then turned their gazes to Shiki. I was just about to offer assistance in introductions when I noticed Shiki stepping forward on her own.

"Nice to meet you. I am Yatono Shiki, Kaguya's servant and Monjirou's slave."

Although I had expected something nonsensical from her, Shiki's self-introduction turned out to be way too nonsensical.

"Ehhhhhhh!? M-Monjirou!?"

"Hmm… Servant and slave, what a crazy position!"

Compared to Fujisato's shock, Kuhou seemed to be murmuring away in deep thought… I had expected these reactions already.

Humans were naturally capable of facing situations calmly as long as they were able to predict future events. Shiki would make a weird self-introduction, Fujisato would jump in fright, Kuhou would remain composed as always. I had already prepared myself psychologically, hence it was only natural to think there wasn't a problem.

Suddenly stabbed to death, suddenly turned immortal, suddenly having someone offer to scrub my back… After experiencing all kinds of situations, perhaps I had already learned how to face most happenings calmly.

"Well then, let us all get along."

"You're not going to deny it!?"

Fujisato's perfect criticism made me feel quite gratified . If possible, I really hoped that Fujisato could become good friends with Shiki, thereby relieving me of the responsibility of acting as the straight man.

"I feel quite troubled that neither of you denied it. Hence, I will express denial: all that was a joke just now."

"Phew… I was wondering when did Monjirou transform from this serious glasses-wearing type to a fiendish glasses-wearing type… I was scared for a moment there…"

Fujisato pressed her hand on the chest area of her loose garment, breathing a sigh of relief. Although I was very curious on what fiendish glasses-wearing meant, I decided to continue observing the situation.

Because looking at the two girls, Shiinamachi-senpai seemed to be thinking about something.

These two girls were still suspects. It was possible for either of them to have killed me or Shiinamachi-senpai, and to think they were able to chat with us and joke around so calmly… I really didn't want to believe that!

Precisely because of that, I would be much more relieved if they could be cleared of suspicions. I found myself feeling like one of the detective novel protagonists who wanted to believe in heroines and friends.

But in that kind of story, those people often turned out to be the culprit so I absolutely could not be careless.

"Are you three on a date?"

"It would be nice if it were a date."

I made a troubled smiled while Senpai giggled.

"Yes, I invited both of them on a date. They are both my good friends so I hoped they could become good friends with each other too."

"I see."

Fujisato giggled and stared at me. I could clearly feel her sending a message of "that's lovely, nishishi" to me. Sigh, yeah, it's lovely, okay?

"Then what about you, Fujisato and Kuhou? What were you doing just now?"

I started to check their alibi. Senpai and I had been attacked roughly ten minutes earlier. If they had arrived here prior to that, then things would be fine.

"My hobby here is feeding cats. Whenever I have a day off from summer supplementary lessons or work at the store, I'll most likely come here by bike!"

Fujisato pointed at the parking lot where many cats were scattered about, hanging around.

Speaking of which, there were really a ton of cats on this island, perhaps because there were fishmongers here . And the only road led to the parking lot, which meant it was less likely for them to get hit by cars. This was indeed quite a suitable place for cats to live.

"I live nearby, so I just happened to be on a walk before my training."

Kuhou pointed to the bridge's opposite shore and told us that. There was a tall building in the direction where she was pointing. That was probably Kuhou's home.

"You've been here how long?"

"I just got here, yeah? I was just saying to Nagi 'fancy meeting you here' when you three popped up!"

"Yes. Adding to that, I was crossing the bridge when Fujisato-senpai happened to pass by me."

"Wow, that really happened? Sorry, I didn't notice at all!"

"You were riding your bike so casually, Senpai, it didn't sit well with me to call out to you."

Judging from the bridge's length, walking to cross it would take roughly five minutes or so. Walking from the location of the attack to the bridge would also take five minutes roughly. No matter what, if they hurried, both of them could still make it in time.

However, why would the culprit deliberately rush here after ambushing us from that kind of spot?

I couldn't feel anything suspicious from their explanations and it really seemed like they had appeared here by coincidence. However, Shiinamachi-senpai made a look as though she was thinking about something again .

Then she clapped her hands loudly together and said:

"Oh right, Fujisato-san and Kuhou-san, would you happen to be free tonight? If it's agreeable with you, would you like to come to my room for a chat?"

That was--no mistake about it.

One of Shiinamachi-senpai's famous invitations--The Night Gatherings.

"Wow, I'm so happy! I've always wanted to go inside the legendary clock tower! I'm free today so it's totally fine!"

Fujisato seemed quite happy and I saw her nodding many times.

"I am also free after self-directed training today. The kendo hall is at school so may I come to your room directly after training, Senpai?"

Kuhou had participated in one of these gatherings before, so she agreed readily this time as well.

"With Shiki-san as well, let's all have a fun time together!"

"We will!"

"Yes, I understand."

Fujisato and Kuhou both looked happy and I couldn't help but breath a sigh of relief.

They had both agreed readily to Senpai's invitation. Based on that point, they really didn't seem like culprits.

Of course, it was a bit unreasonable for me to suspect them just based on the fact of this *coincidental encounter*. In that sense, Shiki was actually a possible culprit too.

I looked at Shiki and found her staring at Fujisato and Kuhou the whole time.

Although I was unsure what kind of gaze those eyes under her bangs were showing, I noticed that her hands, buried in her lab coat pockets, were currently moving slightly.

"Shiki-san, is that okay?"

"Yes. I intend to make a show of my smart pajamas at tonight's pajamas party."

"S-Smart?"

"They're transparent."

"H-How can that be acceptable?"

Going red in the cheeks, Fujisato secretly glanced at me.

If I had honestly said 'I won't feel particularly happy even if I saw Shiki in transparent pajamas', I think the girls were going to scorn me.

In that case, my only chose was to…

"You must wear them!"

"Affirmative."

"N-No way, you can't go 'affirmative', right!?"

Fujisato's vigorous retort made me feel incredibly refreshed.

"Perhaps you two will have to take the trouble to bring pajamas too. Just normal pajamas will do."

Shiki's reminder elicited a troubled look on Kuhou's face.

"Hmm… I usually sleep in tracksuits or t-shirts and shorts, so I don't think I have decent looking pajamas."

She was wearing a tracksuit indeed last time. Compared to the other people's spectacular pajamas, only Kuhou and I were attending in tracksuits. I guess that was probably one reason why we got along so well.

"Well… I can lend my pajamas to you. Kuhou-san, I have a feeling that the soft and frilly kind of pajamas will definitely suit you very well."

Hearing Senpai's suggestion, I couldn't help but imagine Kuhou dressed in a soft and frilly pink pajamas.

…Hmm, indeed, it might suit her unexpectedly well.

"It'll definitely suit Kuhou!"

"R-Really? I've never worn soft and frilly pajamas before, so please go easy on me, both of you, Senpai…"

Hearing the girls chat happily about pajamas, I couldn't help but wonder: should I also prepare similar clothing for myself?

But then I immediately thought: these girls probably won't find male pajamas very interesting even if they saw them, right?

Shiki quickly walked over to my side and said in a barely audible voice that only I could hear:

"If these two are the culprits, then tonight will be the climax of the case."

…What was she talking about?

In other words… If the culprit was one of them, then Shiinamachi-senpai was going to expose this fact… So Senpai invited them only because she was carrying such intentions?

Still in the dark, Fujisato and Kuhou continued chatting happily with Senpai.

I couldn't help but think: I can't believe Senpai is doing this kind of deceptive behavior…

But if one of them really was the culprit then we were actually the ones being deceived.

--However, even if that was the case…

I still couldn't accept it. I felt compelled to clench my right fist.

"If you believe them, then watch tonight's proceedings clearly and carefully. If both of them are innocent, then I won't suspect them anymore."

…Well said.

Everything was for clearing up suspicions.

After understanding that, with a heavy heart, I watched the three girls who were currently laughing together in harmony.

Chapter 3 B-Part - Life and Mind

■Search Results for "Calvariæ":

- No information found matching the search term " Calvariæ".
- 0 search results.
- No related explanations found.
- NO search results found related to the keyword.
- Refers to the hill of Golgotha at Jerusalem, also called the place of the skull.

That night.

Senpai, Shiki and I, the three of us, were gathered in Senpai's room.

"Okay, next up, we must take what action we could."

Senpai looked nervously at me and Shiki.

"Today's event is one those listed in my 'story'. Together with the earlier attack incident, I am sure this is a trial that we must work hard to overcome."

"How was today's event described in the story?"

Shiki asked in her usual tone of indifference.

"From what I heard Senpai said, it was something like *the story's real beginning is a path that gradually becomes clear amidst the gap between life and death'."*

"Gap between life and death… It means Kaguya's experience? Or something else?"

"Well… I'm actually not too sure either."

I see. So even if something was written in Senpai's story, it didn't necessarily mean it would be Senpai's own experience. It could also be interpreted as: in a particular person's gap between life and death, a path will gradually become clear.

"No matter what, the story's content probably isn't referring to the attack incident in the street."

"I agree. Although that incident was very dangerous, to me or some other person, it probably doesn't count as being in a gap between life and death. More importantly, we didn't see a path gradually becoming clear…"

The earlier situation was dangerous indeed but there was no new information to clear up anything. Instead, the mystery around the assassin was getting harder and harder to understand. The only thing I knew was that the enemy's skills were inferior to my mother's, but still at terrifying level of competence.

Shiki also started thinking about Senpai's story with her chin resting on her hand, occupied with deep thought.

"'The story's true beginning'. According to my guess, these words should mean: what happens today will clearly decide the future direction of Kaguya's story."

Hearing that, Shiinamachi-senpai nodded very calmly.

"Yes… That's why, I've decided to take a bit of a risk tonight."

Hence that was why Senpai decided to hold one of those "Shiinamachi-senpai's Stayover Gatherings" tonight ?

Indeed, it was already evening, but so far, nothing special had happened.

Hence, the gathering to be held tonight was very likely where something would happen.

"However, what I'm more afraid of is… If we wrongly suspected Fujisato-san and Kuhou-san, then it's possible they might get caught up in the affair."

"That's true. If neither of them are culprits then they will surely get pulled into tonight's story."

"Hmm, I see…"

I finally understood why Senpai was making a gloomy expression.

Senpai was on good terms with Fujisato and Kuhou, so suspecting them must make Senpai feel very guilty. Not only that, if they turned out not to be culprits, then they also get swept up into the incident.

I hope nothing was going to happen. But since Senpai is a Nightkin and must live according to the plot in her story, then something was definitely going to happen tonight.

When my thoughts came to that, my feelings turned gloomy.

No, how can I get demoralized now?

To protect Senpai, I must protect her heart and soul.

Simply protecting her body was meaningless. Not only must I protect her life, but I must also allow her to live without worry for the rest of her days, that's my proper mission. In other words, suspecting Fujisato and Kuhou was already tormenting Senpai and Senpai was also worrying about them getting exposed to danger if they were not culprits.

Hence, the only thing I could do was to confirm carefully whether Fujisato and Kuhou were suspicious. Once they were confirmed not to be the culprit, I have to take care not to let them come to harm.

For this goal, I must do everything I can.

I took off my glasses and closed my eyes.

My mind became unbelievably calm.

To me, this seemed like an important decision.

In the past, I never got involved with anyone. Instead, I even went as far as to kill people without hesitation.

Under professional tutelage, this was the mindset I used to hold. But now, all I want to do is protect my family, friends and the girl I love, that's my current feeling.

Okay. I've already decided how I will be confronting things. Clenching my fist hard, I put on my glasses again.

"Monjirou, it looks like you've increased your motivation substantially."

Shiki seemed to see through my determination from the side, her blue eye staring at me the whole time.

"Yes, I have to protect Senpai and not let her come to any harm. Isn't that why Senpai chose me?"

"Indeed. For a Nightkin, choosing vassals is one of the few freedoms permitted by their story. And through those choices, a Nightkin can enable themselves to attain the content of the story more easily. Hence, Monjirou, do your best."

Few freedoms.

Living alone in this kind of place, Senpai needed to muster her courage just to do something like going out. No matter how long-lived, no matter how unlikely it was to die, her life was bound to the story. That must be quite unhappy.

Precisely because of that, she used one of her few freedoms to choose me. That's why I need to help Senpai feel more reassured and happier. I must find ways to improve her situation.

"Senpai, I've already decided. I will find the culprit who killed us."

"…Yes, Jirou-kun."

I expressed my determination to Senpai and she nodded happily at me in return.

The final result was: Fujisato and Kuhou were still not yet cleared. Faced with these two close friends, I must take action that constitutes betrayal.

However, not suspecting does not necessarily equate to trust.

If one of them was really living in pretense…

Then living under an equally fake mask, I really hoped I could do something for her.

In a certain sense, this was a kind of enlightenment. I finally understood that being honest and open to friends actually needed a great deal of courage. In the past, I never knew that interacting with people was such a burdensome and tough task. In the past, I was treated as a killer and raised under those conditions, completely not knowing how to interact with people. Precisely because of that, I decided to get to know people better on every occasion. This was something I've always kept firmly in mind.

"Senpai, whether or not they are culprits, the best result is that they can maintain their friendship with you henceforth, Senpai. Or rather, I selfishly hope that this would be the happiest result for you and those two. I have decided to take action with this as the goal."

Perhaps I was simply imposing my own views on others, perhaps this was just my own selfish thinking, even to the point of expression my willful delusions.

Hence, I wanted to follow this idea through to the very end. This represented the thoughts of *my current self*.

"Jirou-kun, thank you…"

Senpai's eyes looked a bit moist and her voice was trembling.

To think that Senpai would be so touched after hearing my determination, to the point of shedding tears.

This was totally unrelated to her identity as a Nightkin , not a human, or the fact that she held wondrous powers …

"Shiinamachi-senpai", this person, always lived in this peaceful manner.

For this, I, Sakuradamon Jirou, must do everything I can. That was it.

"Looks like your motivation is at max. Now let's come up with a plan and strategy."

Shiki suggested, prompting Senpai and I to nod vigorously.

"Okay. So… Let me think… Shiki-san, Jirou-kun, what should we do?"

"The first task is to get a grasp on the situation. First of all, Kaguya, please explain what kind of power is the *immortality* you passed to Monjirou."

"Oh okay. I understand."

Shiinamachi-senpai took a deep breath and placed her hand on her chest.

"…That power is a special ability belonging to the Nightkin that allows 'immortality' to be imparted to others. It is a gift that holds power over life and transcends death, otherwise known as--Divine Gift Thanatos."

"Thanatos…"

"In Greek mythology, Thanatos is the god resulting from deifying *death*."

So that was the proper name for the "immortality" I now held.

Gifts had names and this gift was currently inside me. That made it much more easier to understand.

"The main feature of this gift is of course *not dying*, but … More precisely, it is more like the ability to resurrect from any form of death state."

"Not dying" was completely different from " resurrecting from any form of death state".

The former meant not entering a state of death while the latter referred to rising from a state of death.

In other words, in terms of results, my body would still *die*. Since a while ago, I was thinking it was "my body being capable of regeneration." Looks like I had to correct this idea.

"Understood. So because Kaguya went to pick up Monjirou who had died from the drug, he was able to resurrect."

"Yes. To make Jirou-kun rise from death, it requires from me… A certain 'ritual'."

Oh I get it now?

Indeed, after my first death and after getting drugged to death by Shiki in the second instance, I saw Shiinamachi-senpai when I woke up.

So the reason I resurrected was that Senpai was carrying out a ritual.

"After completing the ritual, Jirou-kun will recover back to 'a perfect state of living'. No matter how heavy his wounds or how much blood he had lost, or even some kind of severe disease, he can resurrect from all cases and return to perfect health."

"In Freud's psychoanalysis, the word Thanatos is defined as the "death instinct". His theory mentions that humans are driven by an instinct towards death and what opposes this force is the so-called life instinct. If you think about it on this level, it can be seen that it's quite correct as a name for a gift that opposes death."

While listening to Shiki's explanation, I touched my chest with my hand.

Death instinct.

To that someone like me with professional killing skills would obtain this power, it sounded really ironic.

"In other words, if you got killed somewhere that Kagugya cannot reach, you will end up staying dead."

Shiki's blue eye gave off an eerie feeling while it gaze straight at me.

"Yes. If I cannot perform the ritual, Jirou-kun cannot resurrect… If his dead boy is left unattended, hmm… Well, as long as it hasn't disintegrated completely, resurrection is still possible."

"There's no problem even if he turns into a rotting corpse or a pile of bones, is that it?"

Although the hypothetical situations brought up by Shiki were quite unsettling, I was quite curious about how far the dead body could decompose and still resurrect.

"Yes… Indeed. I think so."

I can still resurrect from that? Thanaotos really was resilient, living up to its name as a gift named after a god.

"In other words, resurrection is possible under any circumstance… As long as I make sure I die somewhere that Senpai can find me, is that it?"

"Yes. But it would be best if it's somewhere closer to me… Oh, but as much as possible, don't die, that would be better, right?"

Of course. After all, I don't hope to experience death frequently!

"That time when I drank Shiki's drug and entered a state of suspended animation, I definitely still revived."

"Ah yes. On the verge of death… In other words, in terms of bodily functions, a state where survival is almost guaranteed to end. Even in that type of state, regeneration is possible."

"Shiki, you made me drink something so terrifying back then?"

"Yes. That drug will force the human body into a state of suspended animation. For three days, the body will only function at a minimum level and the flesh will not rot. But unless an antidote is injected, revival is impossible."

She really made me drink something so dangerous.

"No matter what, resurrection cannot happen unless from near death, is that right?"

"Yes… Indeed."

Senpai made an apologetic look, hence I really wanted to cut off the topic here.

"Kaguya, I have a question."

At this time, Shiki raised her hand.

"Suppose he was annihilated without leaving an body, then the ritual cannot be conducted, right?"

"Ah yes. Well… At least the head must remain…"

"Survival is possible even if the head is severed. Okay, then death is permanent if everything above the neck exploded, right?"

"Hmm… Yes."

After listening to Senpai's answer, Shiki's gaze fell upon on.

"Hold on, don't make that 'very good' look, okay?"

"To be able to interpret my facial expressions, I'm impressed, Monjirou."

"Come on, I'm begging you, don't kill me again!"

"I will consider it. Good luck."[4]

She probably thought she had just delivered an awesome pun.

I guess I shouldn't retort in this case.

"Anyway, I've already understood my gift. As long as Senpai remains safe and sound, I am immortal, isn't that right?"

"Yes… Jirou-kun, I'll be relying on you."

Senpai bowed deeply to me and I nodded in response.

She was my savior to begin with. Paying my debts was the correct behavior for me as a person.

"But come to think of it… I'm quite curious what Shiki's gift is."

Her gift was called Satori, hence I originally thought she had the power to read minds but that was not the case. With such a frail and petite body, I really wondered what kind of special power resided in her?

"Oh, hmm… Satori is a very simple power."

Senpai glanced at Shiki and Shiki nodded slightly.

"My gift is the Demonic Gift Satori, this special power will heighten all senses."

Shiki explained while frequently combing her bangs.

"The easiest to understand part is that this ability will increase the sensitivity of senses such as vision, hearing, taste, smell and touch. Hence, I can deduce people's psychology based on visual and audio cues then through scents and odors in the air, I can analyze the situation on scene. Then by touching with my hand, I can get a grasp of an object's characteristics."

I see, so that's why it was called Satori.

Although Shiki could not read people's minds, conversely, she was able to read a greater variety of information.

A human's psychological state will often appear in their eyes, their attitudes and their movements. Sometimes, we are able to tell what happened previously based on odors and scents left in the air at the scene. Some people can guess an object's shape and traits just by touching it so if the tactile sense was sharp enough, doing what Shiki said was possible.

Precisely because of that, Shiki covered her eyes with her bangs, controlling the amount of visual input and her body was dressing in clothing that virtually covered her entire body. Using Satori would gather too much information. Once that information overloaded the senses, it might degrade her body as well.

I recalled the dark computer lab management room.

Sitting there in that room without external stimuli, living peaceful days without any stimulation, that was her everyday life.

"I get it now…"

"Monjirou's pity confirmed. Based on my judgment, if I give him a push here, this could very well develop into sexual harassment behavior."

"Hold on, why did you force the conversation into that direction…"

"…"

Shiki reacted to my scolding by turning her gaze out the window with some annoyance then said:

"After my senses were heightened, many symptoms were left behind which is why I've become afraid of loneliness."

"Is that the backstory you just made up?"

"It's true yo."

She didn't say "it's true" but "it's true yo", that felt even more suspicious.

"Hoho, you don't need to be so worried. Satori is a gift that can be switched on and off freely. People possessing this gift can still live like a normal person, yet heighten a particular sense when required."

This gift's original owner--Shiinamachi-senpai--explained, prompting Shiki to turn her head to a different direction.

Shiki was clearly lying, I see.

"In other words… How should I put it? The weakness of this gift is that it could get dangerous if excessive stimulus is picked up while a particular sense was heightened. Something like that?"

"Yes, that's correct. If there's too bright a light when vision is enhanced, then the eyes will lose function temporarily. Corresponding consequences will occur for the other senses when enhanced as well."

"For example, if touch is enhanced, then injuries will be worse if you get hurt…"

"This gift can enhance the sense of touch but it cannot block the sense of touch."

Getting hurt will feel pain. In other words, Shiki must use this gift with precise timing or else she could suffer a great deal of harm.

"As long as I am present, as soon as those two girls make a weird move during this 'heart-thumpinggroup of girls' pajama party, let's wardrobe malfunction' gathering , I will be able to tell immediately."

"Then I'm very relieved. But there won't be any wardrobe malfunctions, right?"

"Rather, your head will fall off."

"That's even more weird!"

Whatever, after all, I won't die. Rather, even if I died, I could still resurrect.

Thinking that, I looked at Shiinamachi-senpai only to see a troubled look on her face.

"What's the matter?"

"Oh nothing… If I had to resurrect Jirou-kun in front of everyone… It's a bit… I think it'll be kind of difficult… "

Why would Senpai find it difficult…? Just as I wondered, instantly, a certain thought flashed through my mind like an electrical current.

Oh right, while I was asleep, it felt like Senpai kissed me.

More precisely, it was while I was dead.

In other words, at the time, I decided on my own to assume it was Senpai's kiss, but it very well could be true .

However, if that really was the case… That's way too much of a shame! Those were my first and second kisses, but I ended up not remembering them at all!

Was the ritual Senpai mentioned a kiss after all?

I really wanted to know…

"Hoo…"

I really couldn't bring myself to ask the blushing Senpai to confirm this.

"Okay, so what's meant by 'Divine Gift' and 'Demonic Gift'?"

"The powers possessed by Nightkin can be divided into different types. Different types of gifts each have their own characteristics. My thinking is… The demons, devils, gods that appear in legends, folklore and fairy tales could very well be Nightkin or their vassals who possessed these gifts."

"According to what I have already confirmed, gifts can be categorized into Divine Gifts, Demonic Gifts, Heroic Gifts, Angelic Gifts and Fallen Angelic Gifts."

My Thanatos was a Divine Gift while Shiki's Satori was a Demonic Gift.

"What's different about the characteristics of different types of gifts?"

"Divine Gifts refer to all sorts of phenomena controlled by gods. Demonic Gifts can confer bodily characteristics that go beyond human knowledge. Heroic Gifts can turn a part of the body into a hero's weapon or defensive gear. Angelic Gifts and Fallen Angelic Gifts can cause 'miracles ' to happen. These are the known characteristics that have been confirmed."

I was very surprised to find out that gifts had many types and each had their own features. In other words, when facing off against an enemy who had a gift, the type of gift was a very crucial factor.

To be honest, I had absolutely no idea how to neutralize Divine Gifts, Angelic Gifts and Fallen Angelic Gifts… But what's common between Demonic Gifts and Heroic Gifts seems to be the body, so I should be able to find ways to counter those.

"I get it, so that's how gifts are categorized!"

I also understood that playing to one's strengths was key in a fight against an enemy who possessed a gift. Clearly there was no way to handle things simply using the concept of "I just need to defeat the opponent before I fall under their control."

"So… Senpai, I'd like to confirm one more thing."

"Ah yes, what is it?"

Senpai rubbed her hand on her cheek and turned to me.

"Senpai still holds one final gift. What kind of special ability is it?"

"Oh, it's called… Angelic Gift Sariel."

Shiinamachi-senpai brought up this gift with some hesitation. I was waiting for Senpai to explain this gift's features but she made a troubled look, seeming to be pondering how to phrase her explanation. Hence, Shiki looked up and answered for her.

"Kaguya is not sure about this gift's nature."

"Not sure about its nature? Meaning that she doesn't know what kind of gift it is?"

"Yes. That gift can be categorized as an Angelic Gift but also a Fallen Angelic Gift. As for the miracle this gift can bring about… It seems to be *control over souls*."

…Indeed, after listening to this explanation, I found it hard too to understand what kind of gift it was.

"I don't understand what kind of power it is… If my memory were intact, perhaps I'd know, but…"

Angelic Gift Sariel?

Indeed, it was still impossible to figure out just form the words "control over souls." Angelic Gifts and Fallen Angelic Gifts could apparently cause miracles but… Wasn't my resurrection itself like a kind of miracle too?

"S-So basically… Senpai no longer has any gifts she can invoke voluntarily, right?"

"Yes, indeed… That is correct."

In other words, we should not place any hope on that gift.

Looks like Shiki and I had better try harder to safeguard Senpai's safety.

I made my decision and clenched my fist hard.

"I also have one question to confirm with you, is that okay?"

Shiki raised her hand and stared straight at me.

"Monjirou, what on earth are you hiding?"

"Hiding…?"

I didn't now what Shiki was asking and could only blink nonstop.

"Yes, I have concluded that you have withheld information about your right shoulder's scar."

In that instant, my right shoulder's scar suddenly felt a pain from its depths.

Shiki's blue eye stared straight at me.

…That's right, by this point, it'd be better to stop withholding things. Just in case the worst situation arose, then even if it meant abandoning everything, I still must protect Shiinamachi-senpai, Fujisato and Kuhou.

However, talking about *that* still made *my current self* feel very uncomfortable.

"…"

I closed my eyes temporarily, puzzling over how to say things, then finally picking the right words and phrases, I forced them out of my throat.

"This scar was carved by my mother… In it is hidden the skills harbored deeply in the bloodline of our clan as killers. It's something like secret techniques sealed inside there."

I spoke grimly while Shiki listened very seriously. Senpai kept looking at with a worried look.

"My mother said that using the power sealed in this scar meant being prepared to abandon everything."

"Abandon… everything?"

Senpai's voice trembled a bit. Yes, what I think " everything" meant included the bits and pieces of life I've built up with Senpai as well as the friendships I've established with others. Once I use that power, everything will turn back to blank state like a brand new sheet of paper.

I could imagine myself after using it, which is why my mother told me at the time: "you must hurry to become a person who can make that decision."

"I think… After using this power, I won't be myself anymore. I'll turn back into that killer, no feelings, treating everyone as objects… Rather, a killing machine."

"A killing machine."

Shiki repeated the words I uttered.

"That's how I've always lived in the past. The Sakuradamon Jirou right now is actually recent… The personality cultivated after I tried hard to live every day with my sister and other people like a normal person. If I entrust everything to that 'killing machine's consciousness' again… This personality will surely disappear. The seal will turn me into a creature that lives only for slaughter. This is the truth hidden behind this scar."

Pressing my right shoulder with my left hand, I told the truth.

Because I trusted Senpai and Shiki, I decided to tell them about my final resort.

If I lost my life, Shiinamachi-senpai could still resurrect me.

But if I lost my soul… Nothing can reawaken again.

"Jirou-kun, your soul will vanish…?"

Shiinamachi-senpai's voice kept shaking.

…Probably because she had experienced memory loss before? That's why she felt a deep resonance after hearing about losing one's soul.

That's right, behind this scar was not a power to protect but a force that purely existed for slaughter.

Precisely because of that, my mother told me I must be prepared.

"If that's the case, we should forget about Monjirou's scar and strategize from scratch."

"Yes, indeed. I don't want Jirou-kun to abandon everything."

The two girls' words made me feel gratitude surge from the bottom of my heart.

"…Shiki, thank you. Senpai, thank you very much."

I bowed my head deeply as I heard their sighs which sounded like smiles.

Like this, we spent over two hours to hold a strategy meeting.

What kind of gift does the enemy have? If I really had to go toe to toe with the opponent's killing techniques, I don't know how scary things will get. However, by making good use of the gift and skills possessed by Shiki and me, perhaps it was possible to put up a fight.

A vassal's power was meant to allow the user to transcend the world's laws and natural phenomena.

In other words, gifts were superpowers that were totally not bound to scientific concepts, hence it was impossible for us to predict.

In the most likely event, we would have read the situation at hand and make decisions on the fly when the trouble was already happening.

And through Shiki's judgment, I had to take action to oppose.

For this purpose, we had to overcome a risky factor.

Namely…

"In that case, I'll tell them directly that I am no longer immortal."

Since the culprit already knew that the Senpai survived despite getting killed, they would need to confirm if Senpai still held that gift if they wanted to murder Senpai again.

Hence, we were going to use this fact as bait.

"So, Jirou-kun, Shiki-san… I will be counting on you two."

"Yes, I'll definitely protect you well, Senpai."

"Understood. The risk is admittedly high but according to my judgment, the probability of success is also very high."

Shiki and I nodded vigorously.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

"Wow! So the legendary clock tower looks like this inside!"

Fujisato swept her gaze around the library monitors' office with an impressed look of admiration.

"There's air-conditioning, a heater and you can cook here. It's very convenient."

Kuhou explained proudly as a library monitor.

"What, how can that be possible!? Aren't the library monitors getting too special a treatment?"

In fact, the library monitors had been assigned a wonderful place so there was nothing we could refute.

Initially, the preservation of books could be used as an excuse for air-conditioning and heating but once the electric stove and the microwave oven were added, it was impossible to use that excuse anymore.

However, once you entered Shiinamachi-senpai's room upstairs and noticed that it was essentially a fully functional suite, then having these things here would seem perfectly reasonable.

"Fufu, however… I'm really looking forward to Senpai's legendary room!"

Fujisato giggled with an excited look.

Seeing her like that, Kuhou smiled calmly.

Which of them was the culprit… It was very hard to decide.

However, Senpai's story seemed pretty accurate so something was definitely going to happen tonight.

…If possible, I really hoped I was able to protect them all.

Was I being too selfish in thinking that?

I was only able to make these friends and develop deep friendships with them because I had "a normal human soul".

Till now, I still really didn't want to suspect them.

"Monjirou-senpai, what's the matter? You look kind of unhappy."

My junior was worrying about me with sincerity.

I really wanted to accept her gentle well wishes.

"Nothing… Nothing much, I'm just spacing out."

"Really? Yes, today was quite hot during the daytime, so it could be a light heat stroke. You need to drink more water and don't strain yourself, okay?"

Kuhou provided concrete advice besides worrying. She really knew how to take care of others and it felt like she was the senior instead of me.

"You can sleep earlier tonight, okay? Then we can all enjoy the view of Monjirou's sleeping face together!"

Fujisato joked a bit with me and I knew it was her way of showing her care.

"That would make me feel quite troubled. If I fall asleep, my glasses will run all over the place by themselves!"

"Eh, really!? How does that work?"

"If I sleep first, you'll find out!"

"Oh, but you're just saying that when you're actually planning on staying up desperately, right!? However, if I accidentally fall asleep first, don't you dare peep at my sleeping face or else I'll have you take responsibility for that!"

"Oh I see. Does marrying you work?"

"Eh, you're way too direct!"

Seeing Fujisato go bright red, Kuhou and I laughed together.

The mood was the same as usual.

Precisely because of that, I hoped that this relationship won't break down in the end.

"Party preparations complete. Please come up, everyone."

Shiki poked her head out of the library clock tower management room and called out to us from upstairs.

"Okay! Monjirou, Nagi, let's go!"

"Yes, let's."

Fujisato ascended the staircase with happy footsteps while Kuhou advanced step by step steadily. When they stepped on the wooden stairs, the stairs creaked naturally. Kuhou followed after Fujisato closely and it felt like Kuhou could catch and protect Fujisato even if she took a wrong step.

Following after them, I went up the stairs then looked back at the library monitors' office.

The door was already locked. The lights were off. No one was hiding there.

Unless the enemy could pass through walls or teleport, under such conditions, no one should be able to enter this building. I also heard Senpai mention that her room has a barrier erected so even people with gifts had no way of intruding her room.

In other words, in this instant--

"Fujisato-san and Kuhou-san, welcome."

If Senpai did not open the management room's wooden door personally like right now to invite visitors into the room, no one could invade Senpai's room.

"Great! Shiinamachi-senapi, thanks for having us!"

"Pardon my intrusion, Senpai."

Then the two girls stepped into Senpai's room… Hmm, I really didn't sense any suspicious presences.

Shiki nodded at me lightly unobtrusively, telling me that she did not sense anything special either.

With that, once the door to the clock tower management room was shut--

--A locked room was born and no one else could possible invade from outside.

At the same time, this meant that the culprit could be one of these two girls…

No, there's no problem.

Even if that were true, there would still be no problem.

I kept persuading myself.

Then I stepped into the room--

Click.

I heard Shiki lock the wooden door.

Then everyone chatted nonstop, this continued for a few hours.

"Ooh…"

I'm the only one who was making a strange groan.

Once girls started chatting enthusiastically, I find it impossible to join in as a boy.

The cakes they tried nearby, making DIY jewelry, trivial things that happened in school, etc. Most of the time, it would be Fujisato excitedly bringing up all sorts of topics then the other three girls would smile then share their own thoughts and experiences. Watching them I really couldn't help but smile. But because there wasn't much continuity between their topics, whenever I came to my senses with a start, I noticed that they had already changed topics so most of the time, I was unable to keep up with their pace.

They looked quite happy, this laughing quartet… Even a mild sense of smiling had surfaced on Shiki's face.

Seeing this scene, I could help but think: Maybe I shouldn't force a stiff smile in consideration of everyone, instead I should nod quietly and pretend to be a boy who's good at listening? But thoughts aside, I was in fact reaching my limit.

Just at this time, I noticed that everyone's cup was almost empty so I happily walked to the kitchen. The kitchen was some distance from the living room, on the far side of the suite, so they could not see my figure. Finally able to relax, I took this opportunity to stretch.

The tea party was going smoothly. Although it had yet to enter the pajamas party stage, as soon as midnight passed, the girls would probably start changing. At the same time, the dangerous experiment was going to start too. Shiki was frequently checking but Fujisato and Kuhou did not make any suspicious moves.

I somehow got the feeling that things won't end peacefully but somewhere in the depths of my heart, I really hoped that everything conclude here.

With these two feeling smashing and tugging away in my heart and still participate in a casual girls' conversation… I really was unable to accomplish such a delicate mission.

I reorganized my thoughts and opened the fridge. For this party, the fridge was stocked with drinks, cake, pudding, etc that we had just bought. If we didn't finish eating and drinking all this stuff, I'm sure Shiinamachi-senpai won't have to worry about the issue of snacks and junk food for quite a while.

The most popular drink was oolong tea, hence the oolong tea bottle was currenly empty. If I had to hazard a guess, the girls didn't really want to drink high-calorie beverages like cola or orange juice, etc.

Based on that, the next popular drink was probably barley tea.

Deciding that, I took out the bottle of barley tea.

"By the way, Senpai, what's your opinion of Monjirou? "

Probably because she saw me run over to the kitchen, Fujisato discreetly asked Senpai that question in a quiet voice.

Oh Fujisato, I have gone through special training after all so my hearing is actually pretty good. Even if you lower your voice like that, I can still hear you.

Thinking that to myself, I still couldn't help but perk up my ears when I heard others discussing me.

"Eh, I-I of course… think he's a good guy…"

"Hmm? Senpai, do really think he's just a good guy and nothing else?"

Kuhou, you shouldn't force Shiinamachi-senpai any further. Although "just a good guy" feels a bit pathetic, this kind of question is really hard to answer honestly in front of others, right? And the person in question is still in the kitchen, you know?

"I find him… very reliable…"

Senpai's voice grew smaller and smaller. I know that Senpai probably lowered her voice on purpose possibly because she was worried I'd hear her, but I was very curious about what was to come.

"Oh dear, let's stop talking about me. Fujisato-san, Kuhou-san, how do you two feel about Jirou-kun?"

This question piqued my curiosity equally. I regarded these two cute girls as friends but how did they see me? I'm sure any boy in my position would really want to the know the answer, right?

"I think Monjirou is super cute! And he's super amusing!"

Hearing Fujisato's answer, I thought to myself, "what the heck is up with super cute" while unable to suppress a smile on my lips.

Although a girl's definition of "cute" could be quite broad, judging from what Fujisato said, it probably meant that I was not hard to deal with.

On a totally unrelated note, this kind of topic was especially potent when someone happens to overhear others talking about him when he was not supposed to be listening. This has been proven in psychology that this was very suitable for manipulating one person's impression of another.

The more a piece of news was obtained by chance, the more certainty you'll believe in it. This is actually a natural psychological reaction. In other words, right now in my heart, my opinion of Fujisato was rising straight up.

"Monjirou, what's so funny with barley tea in your hand?"

"Ugh!"

I came to my senses to see Shiki already standing behind me without my noticing.

"Nothing. I really want to leave the kitchen but they seem to be chatting about a topic that's not so appropriate for me to appear…"

"You're clearly not going to the washroom, yet delaying your return to your seat. This is very easy to rouse other's suspicions."

"True…"

"If you start making out with me passionately here, then there's a perfectly legitimate reason for not returning to your seat."

"Although that would constitute a reason for me not returning to my seat, the result afterwards will be very tragic."

"If making out passionately won't be accompanied by any problems, you're going to put it into action?"

"Sorry, even if that were the case, I still won't do it."

"Monjirou, you're such a naughty boy."

It's been a long while since I last heard the term " naughty boy." If I remember right, it meant someone mischievous.

"I'm a bit curious about listening further to see what they'll chat about…"

I really wanted to know how everyone felt about me. But more importantly, I wanted them to speak freely without reservation, to build up a deep friendship. This was my greatest wish.

"I can understand. If anyone is mixing fake emotions into this kind of dialogue, I might be able to detect it from their voice."

So Shiki came running here to read things outside of what was being discussed. Currently, she was covering her left ear with her left hand, looking like she was making a "I don't want to listen" kind of gesture but probably making volume adjustments in fact. To avoid disturbing her, I stopped my motion of pouring barley tea into the paper cup.

"Kuhou-san, then what do you think?"

I heard Senpai asking Kuhou with a very interested tone of voice.

"Hmm, I like Senpai quite a bit. I think Monjirou-senpai and I seem particularly drawn together by fate."

"Really?"

"Yes. There are more things in common between us than I thought, so I'm quite interested in him."

"Eh? Meaning that Nagi, you're actually, towards Monjirou…"

"Who knows? If I could develop romantic feelings for Senpai, I think that would be quite happy actually."

Kuhou said these words honestly. Just listening to the words alone, even I felt a little embarrassed but for some reason, her words--

"…I can sense a kind of loneliness in her words together with a kind of resignation feeling towards the world."

Hearing Shiki's comment, I confirmed that my feeling was correct.

Loneliness and resignation.

Although I couldn't see Kuhou's face while she was talking, would her face be filled with sorry actually?

"Oh my, the topic seems to have taken a gloomy turn? Oh right, I'd like to ask Shiinamachi-senpai too."

"Oh okay. Please ask?"

"Yesterday, Monjirou-senpai told us some interesting things. We talked about deductive games, gifts and other topics. When I was listening to Senpai, I thought… Although it's just a game, but why would Senpai still be able to tell everyone that 'the culprit is short in height' after getting murdered?"

Oh, that was the part I wasn't able to explain well. If I said that Senpai actually didn't die, then it would be quite weird for me as the person providing information.

"Oh okay, that's because… Within the story's setting, in the end, I didn't die."

"Haha, I see. Then in real life, Senpai will die like an ordinary person?"

"Yes… I think right now, I probably would die."

The instant Shiinamachi-senpai answered in that manner…

All the lights in the clock tower management room went off, plunging everything into darkness.

"Wah, what's going on, a power failure!?"

I heard Fujisato cry out in a panic but could not hear the other two girls' voices.

"Monjirou."

Next to me, I heard Shiki call out sharply then I felt someone pull my left hand.

"Shiki, this is…"

"I don't think there is any need to ask at the moment."

The current situation was clearly quite suspicious.

As soon as Senpai answered Kuhou that she can die right now, this abnormal situation immediately happened. In other words… Everything had started already?

Probably thanks to her gift, Shiki ran in the darkness without hesitation. My entire view was dark. By chance, I looked at her, only to see--

A faint golden light fluttering in the air, looking like a butterfly.

That was… Shiki's left eye.

The golden left eye normally covered by her bangs was moving currently with the light, as though encouraging me.

I heard some kind of sound.

It sounded like someone stepping hard on the floor.

That was the sound from that time!

"In that case!"

I charged towards the direction Shiki had pulled me then took off my glasses.

Next, I threw a knife at the location of foosteps.

"!"

Separated by darkness, I heard someone suppress their breath on the other side.

Clang!

I heard the sound of a thrown knife getting deflected.

"Wah, what's going on, what on earth is happening!?"

Fujisato cried out in a panic.

At the same time, someone pulled the curtains open.

Outside the window, there happened to be a full moon in the sky, its faint moonlight streaming into the room.

The figures illuminated under the moonlight was…

First of all, it was Shiinamachi-senpai pulling the curtains.

Next to her was Shiki, trying to protect her.

Then--

"Kuhou…"

My junior--Kuhou Nagi--was standing there, a large knife held in each hand.

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

"Eh, what's going, what on earth is this?"

Watching this scene, Fujisato immediately hid her head under a seat cushion, curling herself into a ball.

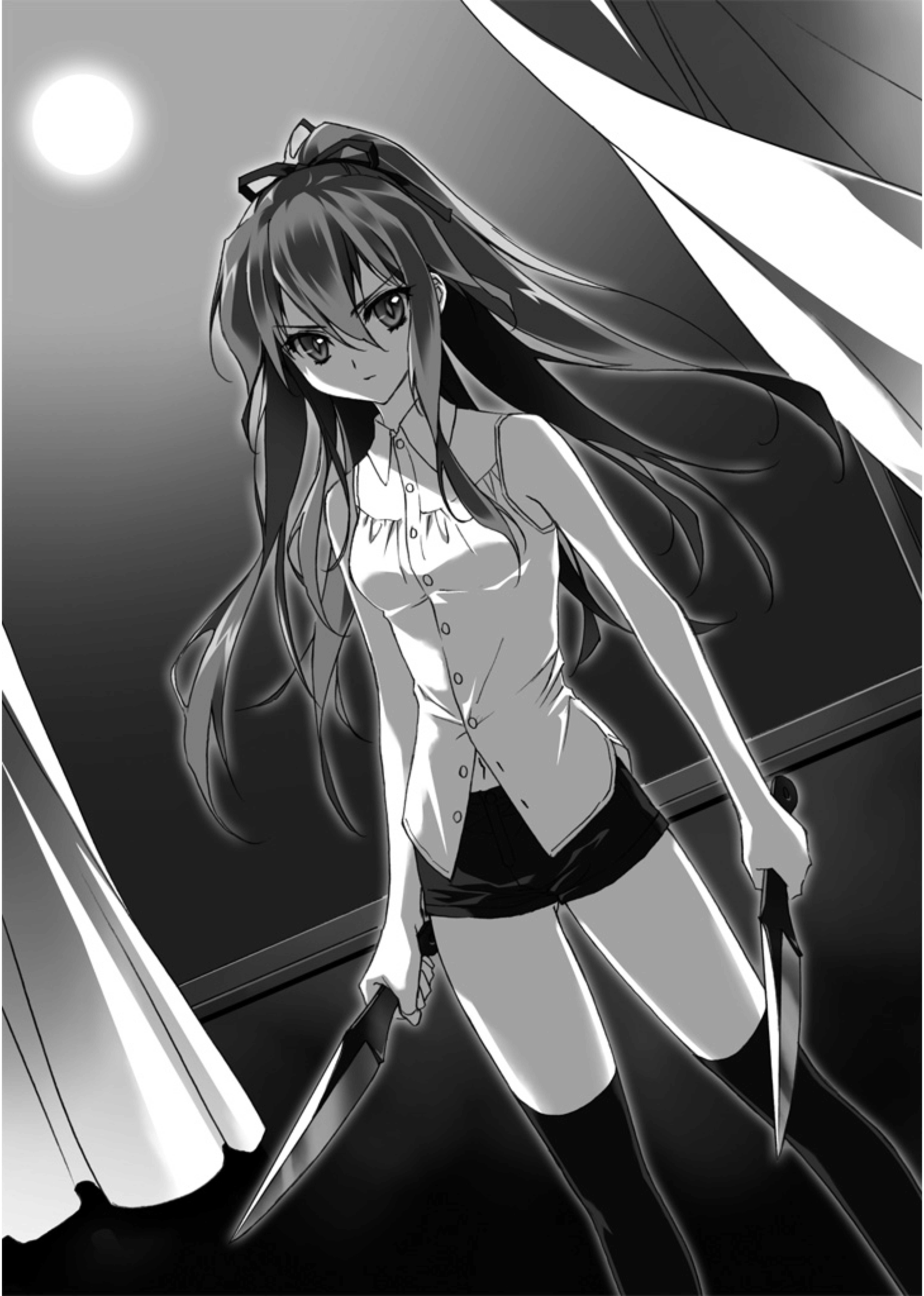
This was the usual reaction to an earthquake but I hoped she could stay still like that the whole time.

That was because I was currently facing off against Kuhou. Kuhou had a large knife in each hand, staring intently at Senpai and me.

"I see. I never expected you to pick up the knives I threw earlier, only to use them in this occasion!"

She raised her left knife up near her throat. Under the moonlight, the blade gleamed brightly. She had apparently used that knife to block the knife I had thrown.

Judging from her words, I knew that Kuhou was the one who attacked Senpai and me during the day.



In other words, Kuhou was the one targeting our lives.

Thud.

Hearing that footstep again, I instantly felt a bad sense of foreboding so I swiftly pounced at Shiinamachi-senpai.

Immediately--

Stab!

Kuhou's knife embedded itself deeply into my chest.

Whether based on the distance or the time, it was way too weird. I can't believe Kuhou could come over to my side instantaneously. Was she able to attack me without any preparatory motions beforehand?

If that was the case, why couldn't I read the trajectory of her movements?

She twisted the blade without hesitation, as though trying to gouge the spot I was stabbed. Just getting stabbed was already painful enough, but after she did that, it felt as though my muscle fibers, bones, blood vessels, internal organs and cells were being sliced to pieces by her knife. I almost fainted on the spot.

"As expected of Monjirou-senpai. To think you were able to predict my movements and swiftly take action to protect Senpai."

"Ugh!"

Although I had fortunately evaded such that she did not hit a critical spot but Kuhou looked like she intended to kill me with one strike, hence she twisted the knife that were stabbed into my chest.

This was a totally logical way of killing. As a former professional killer, I would have done the same. If I were armed the same way as Kuhou, then my next move would be to use the other knife to target the enemy's throat--

Instantly, a golden brightness flashed across the corner of my eye.

"!"

Kuhou gasped. Almost at exactly the same time, Shiki threw something at Kuhou's position.

I only heard the sound of something moving through the air but didn't know what Shiki had thrown. Kuhou immediately jumped backwards as though sensing danger.

Thud.

The sound of footsteps came from an unbelievable location. Near the wooden door entrance.

Kuhou was clearly just by the window just now but now she was suddenly at the door. No matter how fast her movements, even to the point of using the ultimate martial arts technique of Shukuchi, earth reduction, it would still be impossible. I was so certain because once again, I did not see any trajectory of movement at all. In the last while, Kuhou had been moving instantaneously a number of times as though teleporting, disappearing instantly then reappearing instantly.

Could it be that Kuhou's gift was teleportation?

"Yatono Shiki, looks like you are not someone to be underestimated either."

Standing in front of the wooden door, Kuhou said to Shiki.

Then--

"Kuhou Nagi, a trap has already been set where you are standing."

Shiki's voice sounded coldly as she deftly and rapidly lifted her left hand.

Immediately, several lacerations appeared on Kuhou's body while she stood at the entrance. Those lacerations were tearing at Kuhou's clothing in a circular patterns, instantly drawing blood.

"These are… cutting wires?"

"Indeed. I have taken sharp wires of high strength and processed them to become tools I can control freely by will. Using my Satori, I can make the wires move in all sorts of trajectories just by moving my finger according to the sensations on my fingertips."

"I see, that is to say… You have already guessed what my gift is, roughly?"

"I was quite surprised that you were able to evade my sensory perception. But thanks to that fact, I finally understood your gift and I have reached the conclusion that my guess is correct."

Escaping Shiki's sensory perception? To think Kuhou possessed such an ability?

To protect Shiinamachi-senpai, I stood up while pressing my hand to my chest… I watched intently Shiki and Kuhou with my blurry vision. Right now, I was heavily injured and could only count on Shiki.

Perhaps I could try making myself die then have Shiinamachi-senpai resurrect me, then I could enter the fray again. However, faced with Kuhou and her special gift, I don't think I really have the time to die once and have Senpai raise me from death.

While Kuhou was occupied with Shiki, she probably couldn't split her attention to over here. But the instant I died and collapsed, she would most likely do everything she can to kill Shiinamachi-senpai. Even if she might end up killed by Shiki afterwards, I think it was possible that she would still take out Senpai first.

Because she is an assassin.

To accomplish their missions, assassins absolutely do not care for their own safety.

My current self had not undertaken any assassination operations for quite a while and in my injured state, I was totally not up to it. The only thing I was able to do was to continue standing here to protect Shiinamachi-senpai here, preventing Kuhou from taking the worst course of action.

As long as I stayed standing here in vigilance, Kuhou must confront her one-against-two situation. Kuhou now knew that Shiki was in possession of substantial capability and a gift, so I was quite certain she would try to avoid the worst case scenario.

I had actually suffered injuries that were sufficient for death. Left alone, these injuries will cause me to succumb to death in the end. Would Shiki be able to suppress Kuhou before I died? Or was the only thing I could do now make myself die so as to make the most of the tim?

"Jirou-kun…"

I can't let her kill Senpai. I don't want Kuhou to kill Senpai again.

"Kuhou Nagi, do not make a reckless move if you are smart. A large number of Yatono cutting wires have been setup here already."

"Hmph, I will get killed by you if I make a reckless move? I see, judging from these cutting wires appearing suddenly at this spot and the other wires setup on scene … You have come up with countermeasures from the start."

"I wouldn't have figured out your gift if you hadn't attacked Monjirou in the daytime. Since I was unable to capture any enemy movements withy my sensory perception, it must be the result of the enemy using a gift . Reasoning from there, it was naturally very easy to guess the kind of gift you have."

Hearing the sound of wind slicing, I then saw something undulating in the corner of my eye, flashing. Those were probably the "cutting wires" controlled by Shiki.

In the past, I've heard my mother mention about a kind of combat technique using wires as weapons. The user can use wires to setup all kinds of traps, locking the opponent into a barrier. A person using wires as weapons was like a spider. One moment of carelessness and you'd get entangled and devoured by the spider.

I suddenly recalled how I carelessly got poisoned by Shiki earlier. Now I finally understood: Shiki was a person who possessed such techniques.

"Eh, w-what's going on? What on earth's happening? Is everyone playing a fighting game? Or…"

I heard Fujisato's panicking voice. She had looked up from the cushion and was looking around. But under such faint moonlight, most people probably wouldn't see much, right? Assassins like us had professional training for fighting in the dark and could naturally get a grasp on the situation, but Fujisato was just an ordinary person, completely unable to see clearly what was happening in her surroundings.

"Or perhaps… Eh? Monjirou, y-you're hurt?"

But she seemed to be able to get vague glimpse of my injuries as I stood by the window so she asked me in a worried voice.

Fujisato was totally innocent while Kuhou was totally guilty.

So that was the truth.

"Uh… Fujisato… S-Sorry… Could you… please continue to… huddle up and hide…?"

"Eh? I-Is that really okay? Monjirou, are you really okay?"

Under these conditions, I can't believe Fujisato was still inquiring about my condition. What a kind-hearted girl.

On the other hand, the other girl who was originally supposed to be kind-hearted as well, Kuhou, was current immobilized.

She was exchanging glares with Shiki while trying to turn her gaze towards Fujisato.

"Indeed, Fujisato-senpai. You should listen to Monjirou-senpai. Stay still and don't move. We are currently busy handling something difficult to explain."

I was quite surprised to hear what Kuhou said to Fujisato.

Her various merciless acts, including attempts on Senpai's life and trying to maximize the wound on my chest, all this was making me give up on my original impressions of her, leading me to the conclusion that all of Kuhou's previous behavior was an act. However, by trying to keep Fujisato out of this currently, it made her seem more like the Kuhou I used to know.

The Kuhou who had become friends with me and the Kuhou who had murdered Senpai and me, who on earth was the real Kuhou?

"I-I get it… You two… have to explain to me what on earth was going on afterwards, okay!?"

Fujisato crouched down and hid her head under the cushion again, curling her entire self into a ball.

I really felt gratified that I had such understanding friends.

"…Yeah… I… will surely to explain to you…"

It took me so much time to understand the whole story and now I had to explain to Fujisato afterwards.

But no, she's right.

The future… I really hoped there was a future where Kuhou and I could explain the entire incident to Fujisato together.

Although we were currently in a hostile situation, if everything could be resolved without heavily injuring Kuhou… I know this idea is a bit naïve but I sincerely hoped for such a result.

Hence…

"Uh… Shiki! Are you… Okay?"

"Unsure. Although I have gotten a handle on her gift, I am not certain of the area of the gift's effects, neither do I know if it has any restrictions."

"Okay, excellent. I was worried, not knowing how much you knew about it. In that case--"

A smile appeared on Kuhou's face, then immediately--

"Shiki, watch out!"

"!?"

By the time I noticed, Kuhou had already struggled free of those cutting wires entangling her and was now standing before Shiki.

At some unknown point in time, the wounds on her body where the wires were entangled had gotten deeper. Her slender body was bleeding all over, quite a heart wrenching sight. When exactly did she struggle free from the cutting wires? And when did she receive sound grievous wounds? There were no answers for all these questions.

Wait a sec, no way… "When" was the key…?

"I will now take your life."

Kuhou made a thrust with the knife in her hand with rapid speed.

"Sorry, that's impossible."

Shiki instantly fluttered her lab coat.

Kuhou seemed to think it was just a trick from Shiki and continued to thrust the knife forward without hesitation.

However, Shiki was no longer where the blade reached.

From behind the two girls, I could see very clearly that Shiki had swiftly hit the floor while fluttering her lab coat.

"I see, you saw it!"

"My hearing, taste, smell and touch have been maximized in sensitivity."

Hitting the floor, Shiki rolled and performed a flip, the tip of her foot catching Kuhou's leg with perfect timing.

Shiki's foot splendidly hooked Kuhou's joint then used her momentum to rotate, trying to sweep Kuhou to fall.

Kuhou fell down hard on the floor--This did not happen.

Her arms were pulled up, looking like she was suspended from the ceiling. As for her feet, they hanging just slightly above touching the floor.

On a closer look, wires had been wrapped around her wrists at some point in time.

"When exactly… No wait, you deliberately baited me? When I was stabbing at the lab coat with the knife, the wires were already set up all over it… Right?"

"Yes, these are the true skills and power of Yatono."

What an amazing battle.

Most likely, long before Kuhou arrived at this room, Shiki had already setup cutting wires all over the place. While preparing for the party, she was actually setting up and preparing the cutting wires. If Shiki had not understood Kuhou's gift to some extent or setup these wires beforehand, things wouldn't have gone so smoothly as now.

Judging from an assassin's standpoint, Kuhou's movements were like art, every strike calling for absolute lethality. The level of her movements was definitely even higher than the skills I'd learned. Or rather, those were movements devoid of hesitation, something that I absolutely cannot hold a candle to. In other words, she probably had accumulated a lot of "experience" in the past.

In addition, Shiki's movements were also on an expert's level. Those were splendid moves all for countering the strong. Only by fully grasping the concept that "a strong opponent will definitely act in this manner" would it be possible to undertake such crafty actions. She must have fought many strong opponents in the past to reach her current level.

I could hardly hide the shock in my heart, to think that there were so many "specialists" in my midst. Not only that, these specialists all possessed "gifts".

"So this is Demonic Gift Satori? I remember that this gift can sharpen all sensory perceptions, doesn't it? I see, for someone using the cutting wires technique to be able to acquire this kind of gift, it comes as no surprise that you are this powerful."

"Kuhou Nagi, I also understand your gift very well. It is Divine Gift Chronos."

Kuhou simply grinned in the corner of her lips and did not reply. Suspended with her arms from the ceiling, she was completely immobilized. Under such conditions, it was hard to believe she was showing such a composed look on her face.

I remember the name "Chronos".

While looking up the origins of my gift's name--Thanatos--I chanced upon that name, that of a deity in Greek mythology. My Thanatos was the god obtained by deifying "death" whereas Chronos was the god from deifying "time". If my gift was escaping the limits of " death" then Kuhou's gift involved "time"…?

"That is why you are now unable to move, after being tied up totally."

"Yes, well said. Indeed, I am able to use the duration of one second. This is the power conferred to me from the Nightkin I serve, and I am my lord's vassal."

Using the duration of one second.

Instantly, all sorts of questions in my mind were answered.

Although I didn't know what exactly was "using the duration", if time could be stopped for brief instants, then all the culprit's actions could be explained reasonably.

After killing Shiinamachi-senpai and returning to the club showers, Kuhou spent roughly ten minutes to wash off the traces and smell of the blood that had splattered on her. Then she ran into me in front of the school. To kill me, she probably trailed me from behind. If she was able to stop time for one second, then it was possible to enter the clock tower's entrance with me without my noticing at all.

Judging from her physical abilities, running quickly to the back of the clock faceplate before time started flowing again should be very easy.

While I was discovering Shiinamachi-senpai's dead body, she could ascend the stairs in a series of jumps, then there wouldn't be any sounds from the wooden steps' friction. By controlling the instants she landed so that the creaking was only generated within those single seconds, I naturally wouldn't hear any sound.

That thud I heard just before getting stabbed to death was the footstep sound that came when Kuhou's gift released its effects. Had she made a sound prior to that, I would have likely noticed her.

A killer possessing such well-trained skills and even this kind of gift with such versatile applications.

It was a bit cheating for me to acquire immortality as a killer, of course, but Kuhou's power was equally game-breaking.

But never would I have expected my question over lunch, "Do you have a gift, Kuhou?", to be right on the money.

"Monjirou-senpai I am very sorry. I can't believe I stabbed you twice."

Kuhou spoke to me in her usual tone of voice.

"Actually, I really didn't want to kill Shiinamachi-senpai but I cannot refuse the mission given by my lord. I harbor no ill will towards any of you and I don't hate or resent you either. Instead, I actually like you and Senpai very much. Please don't worry about that ."

"Don't worry…? You…"

"I have also done rather regrettable things to Shiinamachi-senpai. I was quite surprised to find out she was still alive but it made me feel relieved as well. At he same time, I felt very guilty knowing I would need to kill her again."

"…Kuhou-san, please don't say that. I am one of the Nightkin who have always been targeted and killed. That cannot be helped. Even so, I am very happy that you were willing to be friends with me."

How should I say this…?

There was a sense of total abandonment in Kuhou's words.

Hung from the ceiling by Shiki's cutting wires, she was unable to swing a knife nor was she able to move. If she had a teleporting ability, that might be able to get out of her current situation. However, her gift only allowed her to stop time for brief instances, so there was probably no way for her to struggle free from the wires.

Was everything about to end like this…?

Next, once Kuhou was disarmed and a way was found to persuade here, could this be the end to the whole incident?

Just now, she mentioned the 'mission given by my lord ' which really concerned me. Who was the Nightkin behind her? In other words, there was a mastermind controlling everything in the shadows. Must we take care of that person before everything could end?

However, we did survive the attack just now. So, I finally--

Was it okay for me to collapse now…?

Clearly everything was resolved so why this foreboding feeling surfacing in my heart?

Because I was unable to maintain my consciousness any further, I decided to move closer to Senpai as much as possible.

While trying hard to press my right hand on the heavily bleeding wound on my chest, I moved closer to Shiinamachi-senpai's side.

"Jirou-kun…"

Senpai's worried voice made me feel very comfortable. I even felt that it'd be fine even if I died just like that.

My consciousness was growing hazy. Ears and eyes could no longer perform their normal functions. At this rate, I was about to die. I thought over these things in a relaxed manner, treating death as sleep…

Accidentally, I happened to glance in Fujisato's direction, only to discover--

She was no longer there.

"Fuji… sato?"

I spun my muddled head, trying to look for Fujisato but she ended up in front of Kuhou who was suspended from the ceiling.

I really wanted to know when she had made her way there but my mind could not operate normally.

Fujisato stood there with a blank expression, calmly caressing Kuhou's face.

"Ah!"

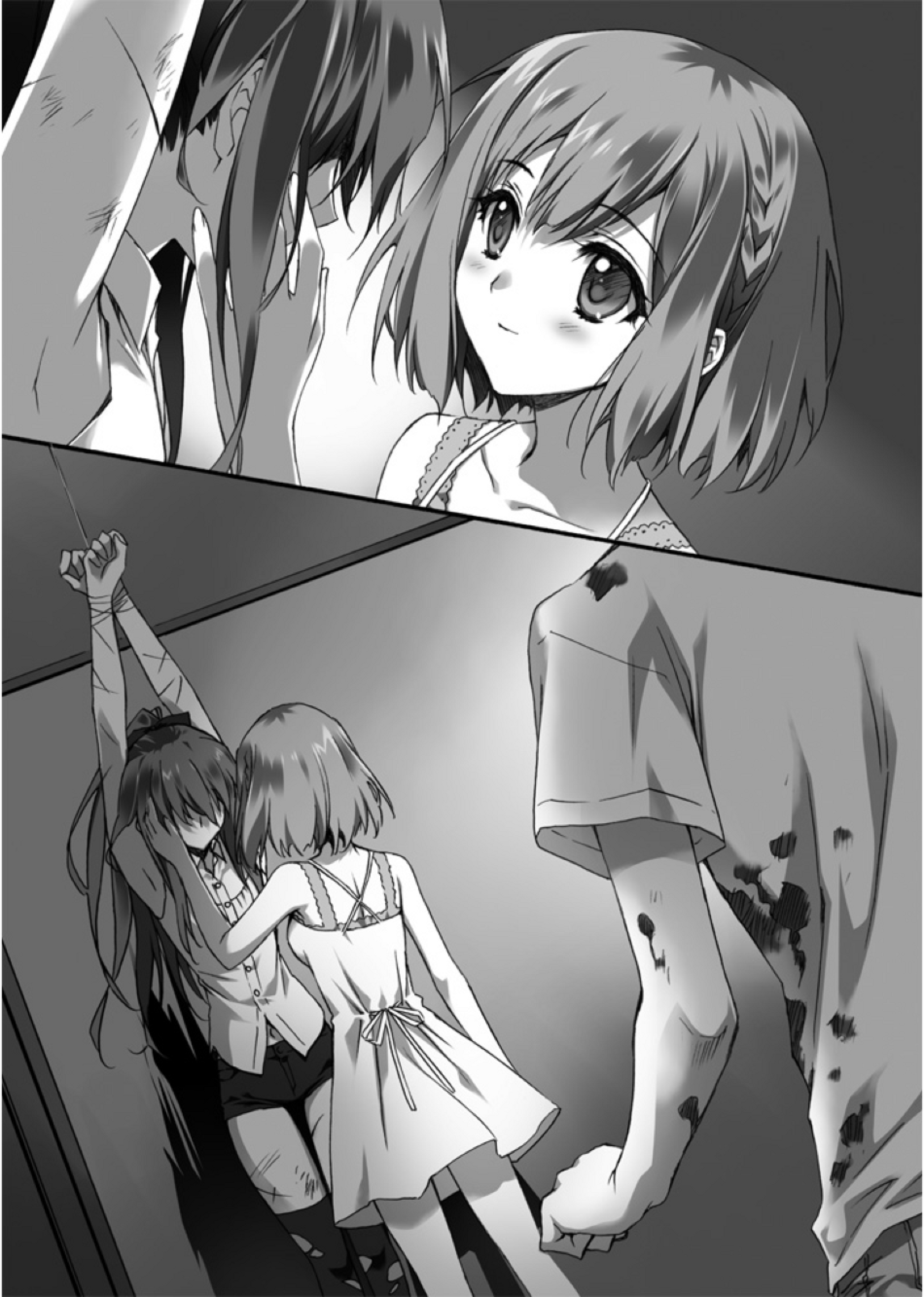
In that instant, Kuhou suddenly twitched… Then went limp.

What? What just happened?

"--Jirou…!"

I heard someone calling me from afar.

"--Mo… Jirou…!"



What's the matter? This voice… Shiki's?

"--Monjirou! Protect Kaguya!!"

Hearing Shiki's mournful yell, just as her voice finally entered my mind--

My consciousness remained fuzzy but I forced my heavy body to move in a reflexive manner.

I turned around, ignoring the intense pain in my body and swiftly performed a spinning kick backwards.

A right hand grabbed my leg firmly, its grip strength almost like a vise. My eyes turned behind me a moment later, only to see an unbelievable scene.

"Splendid movements, Monjirou. I never thought you'd still be able to kick with your body in that state, it really surprised me!"

"F-Fujisato…?"

A right hand, wearing a golden ring, was holding my leg. Its owner was smiling at me as usual and talking to me as usual too. I really could not believe that Fujisato was the owner of this hand.

"But I was really quite shocked. I thought we were friends… But how could you suddenly kick a cute girl like that? Don't you think it's very mean?"

Her eye brows lowered in a slight frown then in that instant--

Snap!

Her overwhelming strength fractured the lower part of my shin.

"Gahhhhh!?"

That unbelievable grip strength of her right hand, and that unhesitating motion.

The behavior of the person before my eyes compelled me to suspect if she was really the Fujisato I knew.

But--I see now.

I did not understand Kuhou at all. In the same vein, I did not understand Fujisato at all either.

In my wishful thinking, I hoped to keep my good impressions of them but I enver considered seriously what they were actually thinking.

"Hey."

Fujisato pushed my body in an innocent looking manner.

This action alone was enough to make my body fly backwards at an amazing speed.

"Kyah!"

Together with Shiinamachi-senpai who was behind me , both of us crashed hard into the wall next to the window.

"Guff. S-Senpai?"

"I'm… fine…"

I couldn't forgive myself at all, to think that Senpai's body served as my cushion.

I struggled to let Senpai and I slide slowly to the floor then I looked up at Fujisato.

She was giving off the same vibes as usual without much change in expression, a smile on her lips.

Just at that moment--

"!"

Accompanied by the sound of a brief exhalation, numerous small wires immediately wrapped themselves around Fujisato's body.

However--

"This… hurts a little."

She simply grumbled nonchalantly.

"Uwahhhhhhhhh!?"

Suddenly, Shiki cried out once then went still.

"Satori is actually quite inconvenient as a type of gift. When controlling the wires, you must heighten your touch and vision so all I need to do is release some electrical currents and you will suffer heavy injury. Oh by the way, the special ability I just used was Demonic Gift Thunder Beast. This gift allows one to raise electrical currents in the body to lightning strike levels, allowing electricity to be released with sparks and thunder."

Fujisato explained her gift openly then walked over to me and Senpai, unconcerned with the wires that had been loosened.

"Kaguya-sama, it looks like you've really lost the majority of your memories and gifts. I originally thought it was just your superb acting… However, seeing you in a desperate fight against merely my vassal, I finally believed that it was all true."

"Fujisato… You…"

With blood flowing out of my mouth, I had difficulty speaking but I couldn't help but ask her.

Why was this girl…

Why was she able to do such cruel things while using her usual smile and voice?

"Monjirou, excuse me but I'm actually a Lord and not human. I was the one who bestowed Chronos to Nagi-chan. However, I've just taken it back, you know?"

Taken it back? So that was how Fujisato was able to get behind me in an instant.

Only after understanding that, I reacted sluggishly with shock at what she just said.

"Lord…? Fujisato, you're Nightkin…?"

"That's right! My story basically says 'must defeat other Nightkin', which is why I've been observing you guys secretly. I tried hard to observe and find out whether Kaguya-sama had really lost her memories or not, whether she had lost the majority of her gifts. No helping it, that's because Kaguya is the Princess of the Night, the lord of lords, in other words, the Princess Kaguya of legend!"

Princess Kaguya. Hearing about *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* in this situation, I didn't feel anything strange or out of place about it, unbelievably.

My Thanatos and Kuhou's Chronos were both gods from mythology while Shiki's Satori was the name of a demon. I finally understood, all Nightkin and their vassals were emulating the plot of some kind of "story".

"I can't believe I can defeat such a high-ranking Nightkin--Looks like my story is apparently developing to a climax! So lately, I've found it very fun the whole time! And I even got to know this Monjirou child and everyone became good friends, yes?"

Fujisato seemed truly happy. This was indeed the her I knew: always chatting with people while showing inquisitive eyes, interested in everything in the world.

At the same time, I also realized why Shiki had failed to discern Fujisato as a Nightkin. Fujisato lived in a world without any pretense. She genuinely believed in herself and spent every day of her life with this attitude. Her gentle side was just as real as the her who had punched us flying just now.

"Fujisato…"

I was filled with remorse and could only call out her name. Affected by the wound in my chest and its bleeding, even my voice had become very hoarse and unclear.

"Yes, Monjirou, what is it?"

Fujisato's tone of voice was very calm, just like listening to a friend's last words. She knelt down in front of the suffering me and cocked her head slightly, listening to me.

"Fuji… sato…"

However, I was unable to speak in complete sentences at this point.

There were many thoughts in my mind and I had many things to say.

But on the verge of death, I wasn't even able to speak anything clearly.

"Monjirou, it's okay. Take your time."

She had already revealed her identity as Nightkin and was now treating me with her usual gentleness. Was she presenting the composure of a sovereign in control of the situation right now because she had already decided to trample us mercilessly later? Or did she really feel sad for me sincerely?

"…I ask you… Fujisato… S-Suppose…"

"Yes. Suppose what?"

"Suppose.. I… you right here…"

"Hmm?"

Fujisato made an incredulous look. It was quite normal for her to do that. After all, I had no ability to fight right now. My breaths were so light they might as well not exist. Shiki had been defeated by Fujisato while Senpai was collapsed behind me in utter exhaustion.

However, even so--

"…If I defeat you here… Are you… still willing to… be friends… with everyone here?"

It was my wishful thinking.

Fujisato stared with her eyes wide open and made a look of surprise then said:

"Pu… Ahahahahaha! Monjirou! You're about to gasp your last breath here and you still think you can fight? Also… You even think you can defeat me? Impossible!"

Fujisato seemed very happy, laughing nonstop.

Rather than looking down on everything, she sincerely found it very amusing, which was why she was laughing madly without reservations.

Hence, how should I say this…? I've always liked Fujisato's laughing face.

"…If I actually manage to do it… It should be… very delightful, right? …Fujisato…"

"Ah…"

Hearing my question, Fujisato stared with her eyes wide again.

Then she relaxed her gaze and looked at me with a tender expression.

"…It's possible. If you really manage it miraculously, then I should be very surprised and I might even feel a bit happy."

Both her voice and expression were very gentle.

However, I could feel a sense of loneliness and despair similar to what I felt from Kuhou earlier.

"…I will surely… surprise you… but I am a man who's … super cute… and super amusing…"

"Eh, you were eavesdropping from the kitchen? Monjirou, you're such a…!"

I spoke, gasping for breath while Fujisato touched my head gently.

Then she stood up, spun a full revolution then bowed forward to look at me.

"So, Monjirou, what are you planning to do? And Kaguya-sama? Including Chronos, I currently hold a total of four gifts! Faced against a Nightkin like that, do you guys really have any chance of winning?"

"Hmm…"

Nightkin were hard to kill to begin with, besides, she currently still had four gifts. One of them could stop time and I was totally powerless against it. Not only were chances of victory minuscule, but it was also what Fujisato had said. Winning would be almost like a miracle.

Hence, I had to resolve myself.

I absolutely must not back down.

I have to use to the last of my strength to do something before dying.

"C-Cough, urghhh!"

So for the first step, I had to vomit out all the blood stuck in the depths of my throat that were hindering me from speaking.

"…Yes, Fujisato, look carefully at me. I will definitely stop your story."

"Fufu… Yes, then you go and do that for me to see, Monjirou."

There was Senpai's story with me as well as the story between me and Fujisato and Kuhou.

I really didn't want anyone to get hurt, that would be totally sad.

"…J-Jirou-kun, you mustn't…!"

Senpai seemed to realize my intentions and she protested from behind me in a feeble voice.

For the first time in my life, I was going to go against Senpai's wishes… And my mother's orders as well.

"…Senpai, I… 'll surely die at this rate… Shiki can no longer fight. But I… really want to protect you."

I heard a sound from behind that was like a gasp.

"I think… The current situation is probably the so-called 'gap between life and death'… So I… want to elucidate a path ahead for you, Senpai…"

Even if I lose my soul and become an emotionless killing machine, as long as I still maintained that *Shiinamachi Kaguya* was my master, then I'd probably continue to protect her.

Although it was only a mere four months since I transferred to this school…

I've made friends and met my crush, found companions.

I've found people and things that I want to protect even if it meant putting my life, my soul, everything of mine on the line.

I think that's quite fulfilling a life for *Sakuradamon Jirou*, to be able to attain all this.

Although I do feel quite sorry for my little sister who put in so much to create "my current self"…

"Shiinamachi-senpai… Is today a safe day…?"

"Sob sob…"

Senpai seemed to be crying. Hearing that sad sound, I felt my chest hurt a lot.

I felt so full of guilt for making her cry. But at the same time, the sense of mission also filled my heart… I must allow everyone to spend their days in happiness once more.

Indeed, Shiinamachi-senpai smiling, Shiki expressionlessly playing the fool, Fujisato always happy, Kuhou calm and composed, I wanted them all to exist in that kind of future. I dreamed of a future story that could be so bright--

I think I already felt quite contented to be harboring feelings of gratitude towards everyone.

"…It might take a long time after this… But I hope Senpai can... wait until I recover to become 'my current self' once again…"

"…N-No! Jirou-kun, I-I haven't gotten a chance to tell you yet…!"

Senpai's hand touched my back.

She had not gotten a chance yet. I really wanted to know what Senpai wished to tell me but…

I'd rather not listen to it all, that way… Perhaps this would leave some kind of longing in myself after I lose my soul.

While praying like that to the heavens, I placed my left hand on my right shoulder.

Then with my right hand, I took off the vanity glasses used for helping me to control my thoughts.

I mentally took the plunge and threw my glasses out.

Then my throat gave a vigorous shout just before the death of "my current self".

"Activate, Code: Calvariæ!"

I said it out. To me, those were absolutely forbidden words.

I felt intense pain on my right shoulder… An ominous skull symbol appeared on the skin along with an eerie purple glow. That light was extremely bright and could even be seen clearly under my clothing.

At first, I forgot why I was in a dilemma.

I forgot how to gauge other people's smiles or emotions.

I forgot what I had done and what I wanted to do.

All people and things I treasured. Consciousness. Thoughts. All of this, I totally--

Forgot.

"Sob… Jirou-kun… Capture… Fujisato-san… But please do not kill her…"

Shiinamachi Kaguya--the master I recognized--issued me her orders.

In that very instant…

"Wha…"

By the time Fujisato reacted, "I" had already closed in right before her. "My" hand was holding the throwing knife from Kuhou, about to stab it into Fujisato's chest before she became aware. Immediately noticing something wasn't right, she vanished without trace. Chronos… The special ability to move through space for one second's worth of time.

"I" had already anticipated where she would appear a second later so I swept my fractured right leg towards where she was going to appear. Just as "I" predicted, Fujisato reached out with her left hand, trying to grab the leg I had kicked out.

Likewise, this move was already within "my" predictions which was why I deliberately used the fractured leg to perform a sweeping kick. "I" had predicted her to carelessly use her left hand to grab that broken right leg.

I used that broken leg's *side of the knee* to support my body. In fact, the right leg's joint did not allow me to finish this motion but because the pain had gone numb, I managed to complete it without hesitation. My right leg made an unnatural cracking sound and snapped in the opposite direction.

"Monjirou, w-what are you doing!?"

Fujisato called out "my" name in her surprise. "I" used my left hand to grab her left wrist while she was holding my right leg.

Then "I" took the opportunity to pull, pulling Fujisato to the floor along with my broken leg.

"Ah!"

Fujisato hit the floor hard on her back and gave out a cry of pain. Then "I" instantly straddled her. Fujisato instantly gave off blue-white light but "I" had already extended *wires* from myself to attach to the metallic window frame, preventing electrocution.

Before approaching Fujisato, I had already wrapped wires that were fallen on the floor around my leg, because… I already knew she possessed the special ability of Demonic Gift Thunder Beast, which was why I used the wires to ground myself.

Fujisato stopped glowing, probably deciding to stop attacking using electricity.

Recognizing that, "I" used my left hand to hold the knife in a reverse grip, preparing to fight.

"…Aren't you on death's brink just now? Why does it feel like your entire person has changed… !"

Fujisato's eyes flashed with red light then her pupils contracted into a narrow shape.

"Sorry, I'm feeling a little scared… So let me control your body!"

Including Chronos, Fujisato had mentioned that she currently held four gifts and now she was using one of them.

That meant that "I" happened to get a chance to confirm another of her special abilities.

Pretending to be charmed by her crimson eyes, "I" slowly released the force applied to her body--

"Yes, just like this… Get off my body."

Fujisato ordered and exhaled in relief but "I" seized this opening.

"!?"

Using my right hand to grab Fujisato's left arm, "I" pinned her forcefully to the floor.

"Gah… Eh…? Why? Why doesn't my Demonic Gift Gorgon work…?"

Fujisato stared in surprise with her wide-open eyes that were flashing red. According to speculation, it was probably an ability to control the target's mind, thereby controlling their body. In that case, such an ability naturally wasn't going to work on the current "me".

"Nnngh, ooh!"

Straddled by "me", Fujisato twisted under "me", trying to resist. However, "I" had pinned her left arm firmly to the floor, meaning she had lost her freedom. Since a Nightkin's body was structurally the same as a human's, then her bones and joints should be subjected to the same limitations in range of movement. Hence, as long as proper restraining technique was used, it was naturally possible to immobilize her effortlessly.

Right now, Fujisato could only use her right hand.

Shiki's earlier verification was correct. Once the body was immobilized, Chronos couldn't not be used for movement anymore. If that special ability was only making time stop, then of course, movement was impossible when under restraint.

Electricity was not working, neither was mind control. The only thing left needed no explaining.

"Monjirou, don't get too full of yourself…!"

The golden ring glowed brightly and she punched with her right fist to attack "my" chest.

Indeed, she possessed powerful arm strength, enough to twist and break my right leg. It was this power that allowed her to send me flying to the wall with a light shove.

If it was just astounding arm strength, it might not be enough to call a special ability. Strength capable of crushing leg bones, yet being a gift at the same time--In other words, the ring on her right hand was probably the "armament" formed from the gift.

In that case, I was able to use countermeasures from close quarters combat. Right now, "I" had presented the obvious weakness of the "chest" to the enemy. In other words, I was using my body's critical wound as bait.

Fujisato's barehanded chop was approaching "me" with amazing speed. Just as she was almost about to strike "me", "I" pulled her hand towards "myself" then turned "my" body slightly to evade.

"What, I can't believe you dodged it…!?"

This was already who knows how many times Fujisato stared with eyes wide. On the other hand, "I" used my right hand to pin down the base of her right arm while holding the knife.

"!?"

"I" had no idea what extent Fujisato's "armament" occupied her right arm, but apparently, just as "I" predicted, her shoulder was like a normal person's.

With that, I had successfully sealed off all of Fujisato's movements.

"Ooh… I can't believe you even managed to handle my Heroic Gift Perseus…"

Completely immobilized, Fujisato could only look up at "me" with a face filled with surprise.

Were it possible to use multiple gifts at the same time, surely she would have used combination skills already to press her advantage. Hence, "I" deduced that she was only able to use one gift at a time, which was why "I" took the measures that I did. And now "I" was also certain that unlike Kuhou, Fujisato's combat ability and physical power were actually not very high.

No matter what, under such circumstances, everything would be settled by simply taking the knife "I" was holding against her right shoulder and stabbing it into her throat. Even though she was a Nightkin, there was no future but death once her movements were sealed and massive bleeding was induced. Shiinamachi-senpai's earlier words had already proven this fact.

Senpai had said: "If today weren't a safe day, dying on the spot would have been likely."

"Huff… I see now. I didn't expect you to be this strong, Monjirou. Yes… Even knowing you've said you were a professional killer, I think I've underestimated you a bit."

Fujisato looked like she had given up resisting. Relaxing her entire body's strength, she sighed deeply.

"Is this the end of my story? Indeed, today is not my safe day but it wasn't supposed to be my day of death either…"

Although she was saying these things, there was a cheerful look on her face.

This probably served as proof: For the Nightkin, stories were a kind of restraint.

Perhaps because of that, having regrets in her heart, Fujisato was showing a satisfied look now.

"Okay, yes. Monjirou, I will allow you to do with me as you please! I admit defeat…"

At this point, Fujisato looked at "my" face again.

Then her eyes showed shock that could not be suppressed.

"Eh… Monjirou? …N-No way, you… !"

Fujisato kept talking to "me".

However, "I" was unable to make any reply.

Because the current "me" was completely unable to reply.

"It's useless, Fujisato Yuika."

A feeble voice came from the side. Shiki had awakened from the electrical attack earlier.

"His mind is dead. Code: Calvariæ, these keywords… have the ability to instantaneously return Sakuradamon Jirou's superficial personality back to his killer days, resetting all feelings, emotions, transforming him back into a perfect killing machine."

"T-Then Monjirou right now…"

Fujisato kept staring at "me" with her eyes wide open.

However, the current "me" made no response at all.

Suppressing Fujisato Yuika's movements. Now that the goal had been accomplished, this body did not need to respond to her in any way.

"It's like a robot that would do anything to accomplish the mission, even at the cost of life and body."

After fulfilling the assigned task without fail, the only thing left to do was to standby for further orders. However, this body had already reached its absolute limit and was most likely unable to complete the next task or order.

"…If possible, we didn't want to resort to this either. However, Fujisato Yuika, despite knowing clearly that you are Nightkin and knowing that you betrayed him, he still hoped… to live life as before together with you and Kuhou Nagi. It was because he came to understand this point that the ego that constituted "him" disappeared."

"M-Monjirou… How…"

"I" had just heard Fujisato's admission of defeat and now it was confirmed that she had lost all will to fight.

In that case, there was no need to maintain this body's life functions any longer.

In other words, there was no need to maintain the state of the body being controlled by orders--

"…Release Code: Calvariæ… Jirou-kun…"

Just before dying, "I" heard the orders from the master who was holding back her tears--Shiinamachi Kaguya.

Immediately, this body collapsed on top of Fujisato directly, like an unstringed puppet.

--At the same time…

Wonderful, Fujisato was still alive.

I couldn't help but feel a "certain type" of joy.

Interlude

■Boundary between Dreams and Hearts

In a haze, I dreamed that I was drifting in the darkness
.

It was very easy to have this kind of dream when losing consciousness in an utterly exhausted state. In other words, there were two possibilities right now: either I was sleeping really soundly or I had died completely. However, I remember I had already become immortal so the chances of the latter…

That's right. The only possibility was that I had met the death of my mind.

Code: Calvariæ was the emblem of death passed down my family.

It was a power dormant in the blood that was able to raise bodily capabilities and functions to their maximum and allowed the mind to perceive and react to speeds beyond what human intelligence could understand. When invoking this power, in order to make the body make decisions and process information with the fastest possible speed, any mental consciousness was erased to avoid interference.

In other words, emotions and reminiscing were all erased.

Memories were turned into pure information, existing only to make everything more efficient.

Precisely because of that, I was drifting in this afterlife right now.

No helping it. Even if my body resurrected completely, without a soul, it would be no different from a doll. However, After I became like this… If my sister, friends and my beloved Senpai were willing to spend time with me, perhaps this body might be able to give birth to a new personality once more.

Hopefully, everything will turn out as I wish.

While thinking over these tragic things, I floated in the darkness.

Even if that was no longer me, at least it could turn into a brand new someone.

A personality and consciousness different from the previously cultivated "Sakuradamon Jirou".

I was already prepared at the time, knowing this would really result, and I still did it.

Senpai, Shiki, Kuhou, Fujisato.

After I did it, if this body could spend its future days with them together, that would be nice.

Hence, it was enough and this consciousness can be sealed away.

Feeling contented and lonely in the darkness, I prepared to closed my eyes at the same time.

"--Jirou…"

At this moment, suddenly, I felt like I was hearing my mother's voice somewhere.

Hearing the voice of the mother who was already gone , I immediately focused my awareness towards the source of the sound.

"Oh…"

Over there, I clearly saw a woman standing in the darkness--

Mother.

Straight black hair, a petite and slender body, white uniform.

Judging from appearances, she was clearly middle or maybe high school age.

However, her sharp gaze did not show anything child-like about them.

That's my mother--Sakuradamon Yuuto.

Most likely a fake name. Age was probably faked too.

Although my mother and I belonged to the same family, it was possible that she was not my real mother at all.

That's the kind of woman she was.

"Mother, hello again."

I spoke up but my mother only threw me a cold gaze.

"How dare you shamelessly call me mother at this time ?"

She suddenly made a declaration of refusing to acknowledge me.

But it shouldn't be wrong! Ever since my early childhood, she told me "try calling me mother." Henceforth, that's how I've always addressed her.

"Oh right, that person over there."

Not only that, she was addressing me in an extremely distant manner.

"You sure activated Calvariæ rather readily."

"Uh…"

"Didn't I tell you? It's the last resort, once you use it, your mind will disintegrate."

"Yes, you did tell me, Mother. But under those circumstances…"

"You're still looking for excuses? Then you might as well give me money."

"Ehhhh!?"

"I've really had enough."

Seeing my mother scowling and throwing these words at me, I couldn't find any words to refute her on the spot. I simply puzzled my mind, trying to think how to explain the situation and clear it up. In the end, my mother sighed and said:

"Sigh, Monjirou, you'd look really shameful if you died ."

"Huh?"

Although I knew these words came from a certain video game, it really would be extremely shameful, so I couldn't retort back in any way.

"Monjirou, once you use Calvariæ, your mind turns into a killing machine. You should know that… Having done that, the 'soul' your sister worked hard to cultivate won't return anymore. You absolute moron."

"Yeah, I know that of course, but…"

Did she just nonchalantly scold me for being a moron in the middle of her lecture?

But even if she was scolding me, I couldn't do anything but simply keep my head bowed.

"Shiinamachi Kaguya, Yatono Shiki, Fujisato Yuika, Kuhou Nagi. You wish for them all to live happily and peacefully once again. That's why you used that power, didn't you? Moron."

"…Yes, Mother. You're correct."

Moron should be a word for scolding someone stupid, right? But at the moment, I was more concerned about other things. Was this entity that had come all the way here to scold me actually an illusion of my mother? Or consciousness? I really felt quite intrigued about this point. If this was all a dream, it would have been far too coincidental.

"For the sake of their smiles, you decided it was fine to sacrifice yourself. If that's really your conclusion, then you are not fit to be my son. You are just a glasses-wearing geek."

This was probably another term for scolding me? But this term was quite unfavorable from the perspective of certain people, so I couldn't make any retort either.

"Monjirou, pay very good attention here."

I can't believe even my own mother was calling me with that nickname.

"Monjirou, are you actually listening to me?"

"Yes…"

If I don't hurry and respond, she'll probably keep calling me like that, so I had not choice but to reply feebly.

Then my mother strolled right up to me in a swaggering manner.

Smack!

She suddenly reached out and slapped me a good one.

"…Mother…?"

Even though it was currently a dream--

This slap seemed to elicit intense pain from the depths of my head… all the way into the very bones.

"Men have this poor habit, always thinking that self-sacrifice is cool. If you wish for everyone to be happy , then you have to make sure you obtain happiness as well. After sacrificed yourself, do you think Shiinamachi Kaguya can smile anymore? To prevent you from doing that, Yatono Shiki fought desperately to defeat Kuhou Nagi, do you think she'll be happy? Fujisato Yuika admitted defeat with relief, thinking that everyone could spend their days happily together as long as she lost to you. If she knew that your soul was dead, do you think she can laugh anymore?"

Compared to the pain of the slap, my mother's words caused intense pain in my "soul".

In the past, although my mother had taught me various techniques and ways of thinking of assassins, she also forbid me from using everything I had learned. This must be why… She was so angry right now.

"You are forbidden from uttering those words, dormant in blood, ever again."

Throwing these words at me quietly, my mother then turned her back to me.

"Monjirou, does your chest hurt, is there any pain?"

"…It hurts a lot."

I heard her question from behind and nodded honestly
.

I understood. I've always kept myself detached, thinking that the world would still continue to turn even without me. However, I was wrong.

"Since it hurts, then you must embrace that pain forever--And live on, properly."

Thud, thud… My mother's footsteps echoed as she departed in the empty space.

That sound lingered in the depths of my ear--Something was flowing from my heart to my eyes.

"Jirou, this is the true meaning of being alive."

"Mother…"

I cried out in the darkness while her silhouette grew more and more blurry.

Her appearance clearly looked even younger than mine. Her face was so cute and dainty.

But the image of her back, her words, everything indicated she was a "mother".

"Mother, thank you…"

Hence, I couldn't help but whisper.

I will do that--Once I wake up again.

Epilogue

■July 31st: sunny with clear skies

"The one who walks along the same path together, the one who obtained a true heart, the time when the one who appears and returning from darkness--"

Skipping summer supplementary lessons and club activities, leaving school, we journeyed for four hours to reach a private beach exclusive to the Yatono family.

"Monjirou--!"

Fujisato was wearing a fashionable bikini, throwing a beach ball on the beach's pure white sand.

Her smile dazzled under the sunlight, a most memorable sight.

More importantly, given her excellent figure, it was even more awesome than I imagined from when she was dressed in uniform. The first time I saw her wonderful figure, I couldn't help myself from applauding.

I even went as far as to think "even if that body gets tanned, it'll still be a healthy variant of beautiful". However… Do the Nightkin get tanned? Do they even have melanin pigment in their bodies? These pointless questions occupied my mind the whole time.

Kuhou was the one playing beach ball together with Fujisato. Kuhou was wearing a black one-piece swimsuit with a skirt design that suited her very well. The frilly decorations at her waist served to enhance the overall adorability.

Because she was so slender, it looked even more unpretentious. This Kuhou was the best. If one day she should ever gain a troubling outstanding figure, I might not know where to direct my gaze.

"Are you visually raping others?"

"No, my eyes are not that lewd!"

"I permit you to feast your eyes upon my swimsuit look. Especially between the legs. Please go ahead and enjoy to your heart's content."

Shiki was wearing a blue, somewhat boyish swimsuit with a lab coat on top. This getup suited the usual style she insisted. She had her lab coat wide open, displaying herself within. Shiki, could you please pay some attention? This makes you look like some kind of perverted flasher.

"Could you show a bit of modesty?"

"My breasts are very modest indeed."

Self-deprecation, no way? I frantically looked at her face but she was expressionless as always.

"Fufu, I see that everyone is getting along wonderfully!
"

As for the Shiinamachi-senpai of my heart… Regrettably, her upper body was covered by a light jacket.

No, seeing her slender and beautiful legs was already heaven for my eyes, but… Since she was already in a swimsuit, of course what I wanted to see most was her magnificent and beautiful bust. From the very start, Fujisato had been yelling "oh Monjirou, my legs are very stout so stop staring, okay!?", desperately trying to cover her legs, thus causing her soft and supple bosom to wobble and shake.

Looks like girls were apparently quite concerned about their exposed legs in times like these.

No no no, the important thing now is to first get rid of bangs girl here who's openly showing off her bottom half .

Anyway, I really wanted to tell everyone: most boys would choose to stare at boobs rather than legs, so there's really no need to be too concerned with your legs when wearing a swimsuit.

"Senpai, you're not going to play?"

"I was going to ask you the same thing! Jirou-kun, your body's condition should be great, right?"

True, after resurrection, the body returns to a state of full health, so of course, my current condition couldn't be better.

The issue was--ultimately, the "soul" that was about to disappear back then.

Although right now, I was thinking using the same consciousness as "Sakuradamon Jirou" from back then, I really didn't know if this was actually the original "me" from then. When wearing my vanity glasses, I can still feel concretely my crush on Shiinamachi-senpai and the friendship towards my friends. I can also feel clearly those feelings turning faint as soon as I remove these glasses.

Code: Calvariæ had erased "myself" at the time for sure.

Hence, this current consciousness might actually be a different "me".

For example--

For example… I might have followed the orders of my "master" Shiinamachi Kaguya to become a killing doll that imitated the original "Sakuradamon Jirou".

This was definitely possible.

Hence, this current "self" who was scared of this possibility, it might all be just an act.

No one could prove that this current me was the true " me".

This was the most pressing feeling in my heart.

However, at least--

When I woke up and saw Shiinamachi-senpai's face, crying and unable to speak, I really felt my chest hurt so much.

When I noticed my heart ached to such a degree, I couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief.

For some reason, I also remember my face stinging with pain at the time.

Inside the dream, my mother had slapped me.

This time, my mother saved me--Was having this thought an indication of my tendency towards an Oedipus complex?

"Jirou-kun, is your condition okay?"

"My body is totally fine. Soul… Should be okay."

"Yes.. Probably it was Angelic Gift Sariel that took effect."

At the time, Senpai had apparently used that gift on me unconsciously.

However, at the time, she had no idea what changes that gift would cause to me nor what effects it would invoke.

Perhaps thanks to "controlling souls", my mother appeared in my dream… That gift was probably able to project images of people and things that were important to the target whom the gift was used on. Of course, this was just my personal speculation and the details were still a mystery.

No matter what, in terms of my consciousness miraculously recovering…

It was quite possible that Angelic Gift Sariel caused a definite miracle.

"Mentally, things should be fine. Fujisato helped confirm at the time."

Senpai still seemed quite worried about my soul.

Although it was not entirely for the sake of verifying if my soul was okay, after that, I tried asking Fujisato to use the Gorgon gift to control my consciousness. The result was obvious. I was immediately unable to control my own body with my own will.

That gift was supposed to be able to rob someone entirely of their will thereby allowing the user to control the target's body as they pleased.

For the sake of achieving my goal, I had invoked the code which put me in a state of totally separation between mind and body, which was why her gift was unable to take effect. In other words, that was the only way to defeat Fujisato… Right now, it is totally beyond me.

"I understand that you deliberately confessed to Fujisato and hugged her."

"I was being controlled by her!"

Indeed, after knowing that my soul was intact, Fujisato was very happy. Then she used that gift to make me dance and sing, finally coercing me to confess and hug her tightly.

Now that I think about it, perhaps that was her way of taking revenge, to get back at me for defeating her.

The reason why I concluded that was because after that, until the next morning, Shiinamachi-senpai totally refused to say a single word to me. Not only that, the girls also refused to let me see them in their pajamas, even forcing me to sleep outside the door on the landing in the corner of the staircase. I remember I was never treated so cruelly in the pajamas party last time, right?

"Even if you didn't confess to me, you may hug me directly. Please enjoy."

"Shiki, could you not make such problematic speeches without any warning, okay!?"

This girl, who always liked to play the fool, maintained her usual attitude. I was completely unable to tell if she was happy or not.

But she was talking more frequently so I guess that means we've become closer friends.

But even now, she still seems to want to kill me in various ways so I can't lower my guard.

"Anyway, I'm really so glad."

Senpai later found out it was all just Fujisato's prank so right now, she was only worried about me in a very pure manner. Although she had a tendency to be overprotective and worry too much, I still felt quite happy and didn't find it annoying at all.

Yes. Sometimes worrying, sometimes joyful, happy.

I finally understood that these things, always taken for granted, were actually so precious.

Perhaps what Senpai's "story" indicated was actually my path.

Yes, it had elucidated a future path for me, telling "me" what kind of attitude to lead life with.

"Hey! Monjirou! Everyone!"

In the end, Fujisato and Kuhou's faces still had their usual smiles and they were able to continue staying as our good friends. Having fought a bloody battle and knowing how scary it was to anger each other… Perhaps that was actually a good thing. After all, we understood that both sides were opponents that we wished never to engage in conflict again.

After losing to me, Fujisato had apparently given up on attacking Senpai. Naturally, her vassal Kuhou went along with her decision. Conversely, it felt like we had become allies and might help each other's story advance in the future.

Of course, not fighting each other again was the best result. I sincerely believe that.

"Shiki-chan, come swim!"

I don't know if Fujisato was doing it on purpose, or she was naturally a little airheaded, she didn't seem to be harboring any guilt, grinning as always.

However, no one knew what she was actually thinking inside. Whatever, perhaps this is good enough.

"If it's a challenge from an enemy Nightkin, then a Yatono must step up to the fight, naturally."

Shiki also seemed to have developed a weird sense of opposition, racing forward.

"Jirou-kun, let's go swim together too?"

With a magnificent whoosh, Senpai took off her light jacket.

Seeing Senpai's awesome figure, I couldn't help but blush.

"Oh no… S-Seeing you go so red, I feel embarrassed too… Jirou-kun…"

Senpai's swimsuit was the same one she had worn in the bathroom with me last time.

It was totally awesome to witness this scene under the dazzling sunlight. My heart was beating so hard.

"Yes, I won't ever forget these feelings right now… These feelings of adrenalin pumping at the sight of Senpai's swimsuit."

"You know, it troubles me to find you so emotional from seeing me in a swimsuit…"

Standing under the blazing sun, Shiinamachi-senpai awkwardly tried to hide her chest and legs. Acting in this manner, her adorability instantly shot up to 200%. At the same time, I truly felt something else: That I was able to continue living, so happily like this… This too was a most precious thing.

"Oh right, Jirou-kun, I've got a favor to ask of you…"

"Oh, what is it, Senpai?"

Senpai smiled tenderly then looked up, staring at me seriously.

"'The one who walks along the same path together, the one who obtained a true heart, the time when the one who appears and returning from darkness--'"

Her soft lips uttered those poetic words like a prophesy.

That was surely the story of Shiinamachi-senpai's--Shiinamachi Kuguya's.

"'The curtain shall fall upon the king's life'."

My heart suddenly skipped a beat.

In other words, Senpai's life…

"W-When will it happen?"

I felt cold sweat breaking out all over my forehead.

However, Senpai simply… showed a smile of trust and said to me:

"Today is my dangerous day, so please pay me a visit at my room!"

The true day of battle for Senpai was apparently making its official debut today.

Afterword

Nice to meet you, everyone, hello. Those of you who are thinking "I know you already!", it's been a while.

I am Kaidou Reiji.

Sorry, I got too carried away. Actually, I'm Saitou Kenji. My apologies.

I'm so happy that I'm about to fly to the heavens now that *Shiinamachi-senpai's Safe Day* is out and I even got Kaitou Reiji-sensei to write comments for me.

Speaking of which, back when I was writing the *Hundred-and-One Stories*, that was my first time writing light novels, so I was totally clueless. Back then, I referenced *Unbreakable Machine Doll* and finally managed to finish my work. Exactly because of that, I always call Kaitou-sensei my master secretly in my heart. Kaitou Reiji-sensei, thank you so much! If I continue to express my love for Sensei, this afterword would probably get all filled up, so… Kaitou-sensei, next time, let's take our time next time have a more in-depth chat!

So, I wonder how everyone felt about *Shiinamachi-senpai's Safe Day*? Just looking at the title or the illustrations, it probably feels like a work relying on sex appeal, but *in fact*, the content is still classic Saitou Kenji style that my dear readers know so well. If you haven't read the book yet before this afterword, then please find a chance to read the contents. I'm sure that way you'll understand what it's all about *in fact*. So, everyone, please do find a chance to read the story in this book!

However, why does the term "safe day" sound so exciting? Not only that, if my crush told me "today is my safe day, so…", I think my heart won't be able to take it. This story started from delusions like these. Compared to story content and plot advancement, I prioritize… putting a kind of heart-pounding feeling in everyone's chest, hopefully.

Also, if you find any characters, plot or various details in this story kind of familiar, I hope you'll accept them generously with a kind of "oh, this does happen occasionally" feeling.

Of course, I've received help from many people this time as well. Thank you, CARNELIAN-sensei for illustrating such perfect, adorable and beautiful drawings that just makes the heart flutter. Apart from

Shiinamachi-senpai and Shiki, even Fujisato, Kuhou and Monjirou were drawn so exquisitely, I am truly filled with sincere gratitude. Other than that, I am truly thankful to you all, editors who pushed me quite a bit and my revered Kaitou Reiji-sensei. Also, there were many others who gave me all kinds of suggestions, checking my story for holes and flaws. Without everyone's help, it would have been very hard for me to create this work by my own efforts alone. Of course, most importantly, I have to thank all the readers. Truly, thank you very much. Please continue to show your support when Volume 2 comes out.

Imagining tropical scenes: Saitou Kenji

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ Road vs Lord: in Japanese, both "lord" and "road" are rendered as ロ in katakana.
2. ↑ In kabuki, red-faced (赤 / sekimen) is used to refer to the villain.
3. ↑ "popular"(好) and "moniker"() sound similar in Japanese.
4. ↑ "consider it"(検) and "good luck"() sound the same in Japanese(kentou).